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ABSTRACT

This book presents biographical profiles of 10 athletes of interest to readers ages 9 and above and was created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy and readily understand. Biographies were prepared after extensive research, and each volume contains a cumulative index, a general index, a place of birth index, and a birthday index. Each profile provides at least one picture of the individual and information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. All entries end with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual. The following athletes appear in Volume 6: Jennifer Capriati (1976-); Stacy Dragila (1971-); Kevin Garnett (1976-); Eddie George (1973-); Alex Rodriguez (1975-); Joe Sakic (1969-); Annika Sorenstam (1970-); Jackie Stiles (1978-); Tiger Woods (Update) (1975-); and Ally Zirkle (1969-). (BT)

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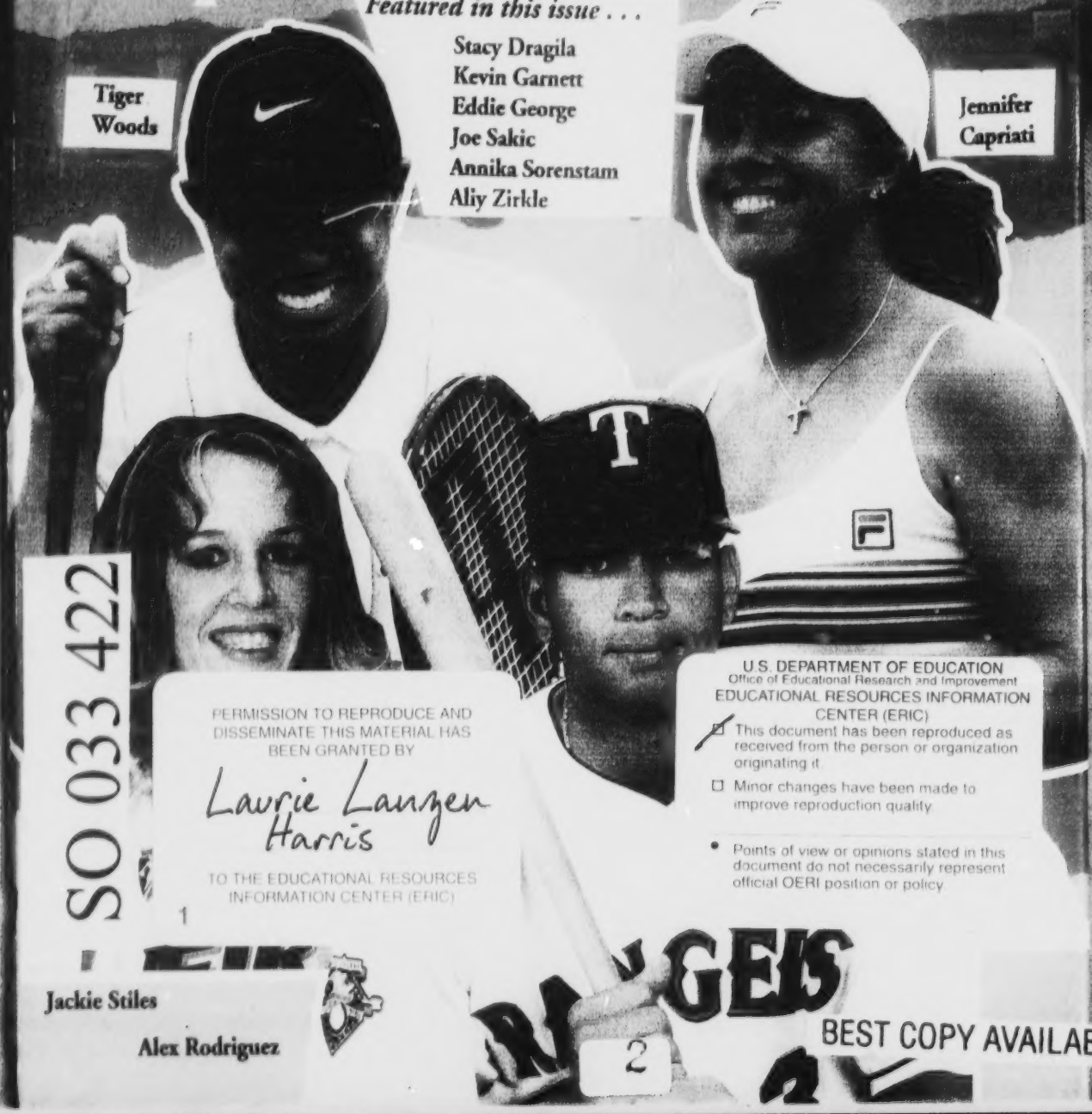
Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Sports Series

Featured in this issue . . .

Stacy Dragila
Kevin Garnett
Eddie George
Joe Sakic
Annika Sorenstam
Aliy Zirkle



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Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Sports Series

Volume 6

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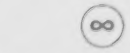

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Preface

Welcome to the sixth volume of the **Biography Today Sports Series**. . We are publishing this series in response to suggestions from our readers, who want more coverage of more people in *Biography Today*. Several volumes, covering **Artists, Authors, Scientists and Inventors, Sports Figures, and World Leaders,** have appeared thus far in the Subject Series. Each of these hardcover volumes is 200 pages in length and covers approximately 10 individuals of interest to readers ages 9 and above. The length and format of the entries are like those found in the regular issues of *Biography Today*, but there is **no duplication** between the regular series and the special subject volumes.

The Plan of the Work

As with the regular issues of *Biography Today*, this special subject volume on **Sports** was especially created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically arranged sketches. Each entry provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each of the entries ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry.

Biographies are prepared by Omnigraphics editors after extensive research, utilizing the most current materials available. Those sources that are generally available to students appear in the list of further reading at the end of the sketch.

Indexes

A new index now appears in all *Biography Today* publications. In an effort to make the index easier to use, we have combined the **Name** and **General Index** into one, called the **General Index**. This new index contains the names of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. The names appear in bold faced type, followed by the issue in which they appeared. The General Index also contains the occupations, na-

tionalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled. The General Index is cumulative, including references to all individuals who have appeared in the *Biography Today* General Series and the *Biography Today* Special Subject volumes since the series began in 1992.

The Birthday Index and Places of Birth Index will continue to appear in all Special Subject volumes.

Our Advisors

This volume was reviewed by an Advisory Board comprised of librarians, children's literature specialists, and reading instructors so that we could make sure that the concept of this publication—to provide a readable and accessible biographical magazine for young readers—was on target. They evaluated the title as it developed, and their suggestions have proved invaluable. Any errors, however, are ours alone. We'd like to list the Advisory Board members, and to thank them for their efforts.

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Our Advisory Board stressed to us that we should not shy away from controversial or unconventional people in our profiles, and we have tried to follow their advice. The Advisory Board also mentioned that the sketches might be useful in reluctant reader and adult literacy programs, and we would value any comments librarians might have about the suitability of our magazine for those purposes.

Your Comments Are Welcome

Our goal is to be accurate and up-to-date, to give young readers information they can learn from and enjoy. Now we want to know what you think. Take a look at this issue of *Biography Today*, on approval. Write or call me with your comments. We want to provide an excellent source of biographical information for young people. Let us know how you think we're doing.

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Jennifer Capriati 1976-

American Professional Tennis Player
Winner of the Australian Open and French Open in 2001

BIRTH

Jennifer Maria Capriati (pronounced cap-pree-AH-tee) was born on March 29, 1976, on Long Island, New York. Her father, Stefano, was an Italian movie stuntman and tennis pro. Her mother, Denise, was an American flight attendant. They met in Spain in 1972, and they were married there two years later. Capriati's parents moved to New York a few months before her birth so that she could be born in the United States.

Then the family returned to Spain, where they lived for the next few years. Jennifer has a brother, Steven, who is three years younger.

YOUTH

Capriati's father always wanted her to be an athlete. In fact, he began helping her to do sit-ups when she was still a baby in her crib. Capriati started playing tennis almost as soon as she could walk. "My parents were always on the tennis courts and had no place to leave me, so they always brought me with them," she recalled. "I just kind of picked up a racket and hit tennis balls all over the place. My dad noticed I had good coordination, so he started giving me lessons." She had several other prominent coaches in later years, but her father was always the guiding force in her development as a player.

Capriati started playing tennis almost as soon as she could walk. "My parents were always on the tennis courts and had no place to leave me, so they always brought me with them. I just kind of picked up a racket and hit tennis balls all over the place. My dad noticed I had good coordination, so he started giving me lessons."

By the time Capriati was four years old, she could already return balls served by a machine and rally (hit the ball back and forth over the net without stopping) with her father a hundred times. "Boy, could she play tennis," her father remembered. "She walked around with a doll in one hand and a racket in the other." At this point, her parents decided to move from Spain to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida—where many top American players and coaches lived—in order to promote Jennifer's tennis career.

Once they arrived in Florida, Stefano Capriati took his daughter to see Jimmy Evert, a famous tennis coach and the father of tennis star Chris Evert. Evert was reluctant to take on a student so young, but he was so impressed with Capriati's skill that he eventually agreed to coach her. He remained her primary coach for the next five years. During this time, Capriati became friends with Chris Evert and often hit balls with her and other well-known professional players.

In 1988, at the age of 12, Capriati won the U.S. 18-and-under championships. The following year, she won the junior title at the U.S. Open. Her amazing success at such a young age soon attracted the attention of the

media and of companies hoping to promote their products. Many people viewed her as the next big star of women's tennis. Even before she became a professional tennis player, she earned nearly $5 million per year in endorsement contracts for shoes, clothes, and rackets. By the time Capriati was 13, the only female tennis players earning more endorsement money were Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova, two of the sport's all-time greats.

Some observers worried about the effect that so much wealth and fame would have on Capriati. They claimed that her parents were pushing her too hard and depriving her of a normal childhood. But her father claimed that it was Jennifer's decision to pursue tennis. "It's one thing to push and another to support," he stated. "She wants tennis, not me. We don't know if she'll become a player. She may change her mind tomorrow and decide to become a doctor." In addition, Stefano Capriati said that he and his wife took steps to make sure that Jennifer led a normal life. "She does the dishes, makes her bed, and cleans the bathroom," he noted.

EDUCATION

Capriati attended the Palmer Academy in Wesley Chapel, Florida. This private school is connected with the exclusive Saddlebrook Resort, where many top American tennis players live and train. When she was at home, Capriati went to classes five hours per day and practiced tennis three hours per day. When she traveled to tennis tournaments and could not attend classes, she took her homework with her or had it sent by fax machine.

Despite the demands of tennis, Capriati was an A student for most of her early school years. During high school, however, she went through a period of teenage rebellion that had a negative effect on her grades. She dropped out of school when she turned 18, though she eventually managed to graduate.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Becoming the Youngest Player to Turn Pro

Capriati played in her first professional tennis tournament in March 1990. At 13, she became the youngest player ever to turn pro. In fact, Women's Tennis Association (WTA) rules said that girls could not play on the professional tour until they reached the age of 14. But the WTA made a slight exception for Capriati, allowing her to play during the month of her 14th birthday. "I'm really excited," she said before her first professional tournament. "I know I'm going to a new level. I'm just so psyched. I hope I go

> *Capriati seemed like a typical teenager in many ways. She loved eating licorice, reading Danielle Steele novels, and shopping for clothes. And her first professional tennis biography listed pink as her favorite color and making bracelets as her hobby. "It's easy for me to act normal," she explained. "I just go home. Go to school. Hang out with my friends. When I'm home, I'm away from the tennis. When I go play on the court or do interviews, I have to act more mature. It just happens. . . . I just handle it."*

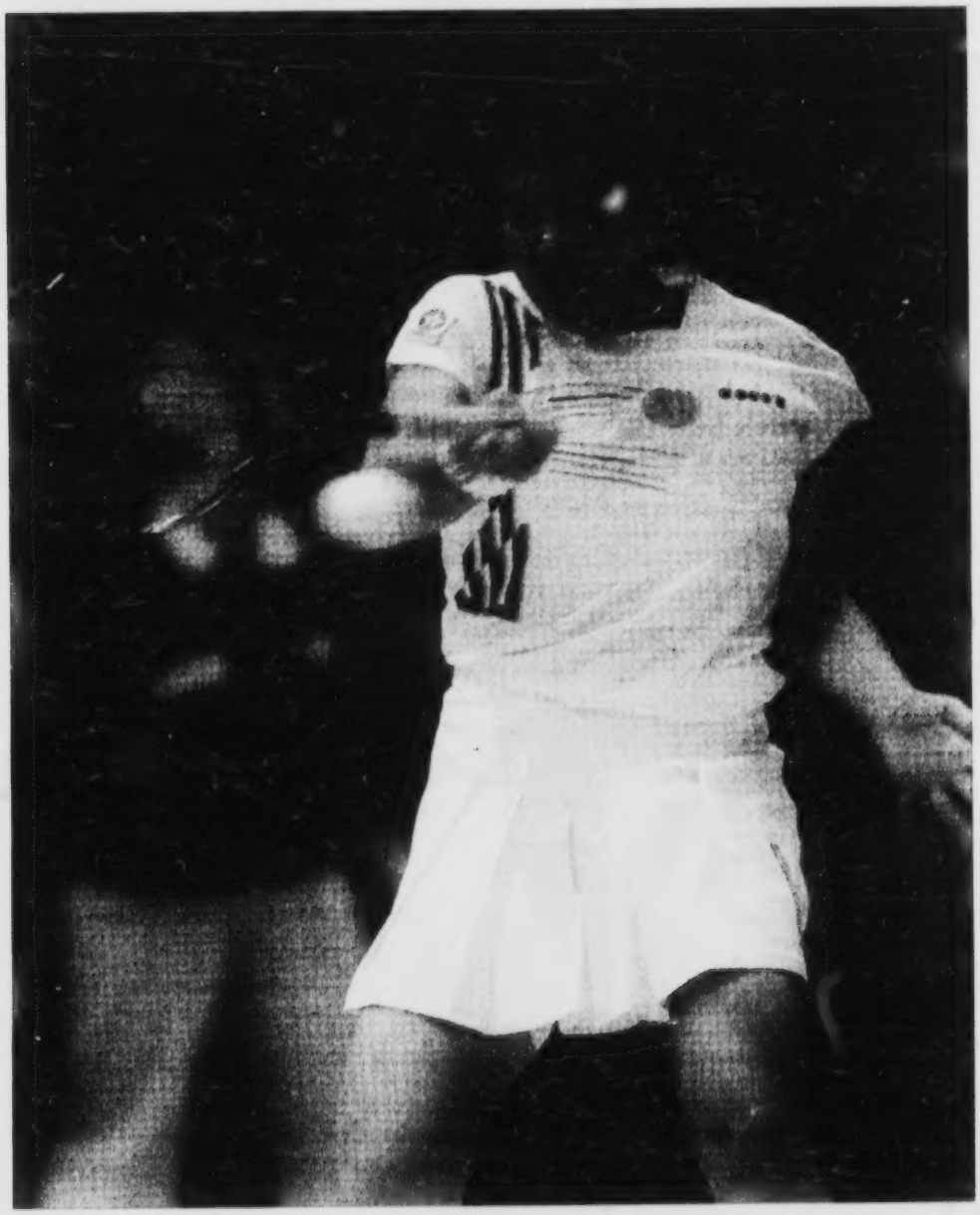
out there and do really well. I'm not nervous. I have no fear, I really don't. If I lose, I lose. Maybe others will be saying, 'Oh my goodness, she lost her first match,' but I won't be thinking that."

Capriati made her professional debut at the 1990 Virginia Slims tournament in Boca Raton, Florida. She used her booming serve and powerful ground strokes to defeat four seeded players. (In a tennis tournament, the players are ranked, or seeded, based on their previous records. Highly ranked players usually play matches against lower seeds in the early rounds. The loser of a match is out of the tournament, while the winner goes on to play in later rounds.) Capriati advanced all the way to the finals before she was finally beaten by Gabriela Sabatini.

In June, Capriati played in the French Open. There are many tournaments on the professional tennis circuit. But there are four prestigious tournaments that make up the Grand Slam of tennis: the French Open, the Australian Open, Wimbledon (in England), and the U.S. Open. In the 1990 French Open, Capriati advanced all the way to the quarterfinals before she lost to Monica Seles. A month later, she made it to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon before losing to Steffi Graf. Capriati claimed her first title at a professional tournament on July 16 at the Mount Cranmore International tournament in New Hampshire. By the end of her first year on the WTA tour, she was ranked 16th in the world. She was just 14 years old.

Too Young to Handle the Attention?

Thanks to her impressive rookie season, Capriati was the talk of the tennis world. Many people were excited to see a new, up-and-coming star emerge in women's tennis. They especially liked her wide-eyed, innocent



Capriati in 1991.

approach to the game and to all the attention she received. In many ways, Capriati seemed like a typical teenager. She gave long, rambling answers to interview questions, often punctuated with "like" and "you know." She loved eating licorice, reading Danielle Steele novels, and shopping for clothes. And her first professional tennis biography listed pink as her favorite color and making bracelets as her hobby. "It's easy for me to act normal," she explained. "I just go home. Go to school. Hang out with my

friends. When I'm home, I'm away from the tennis. When I go play on the court or do interviews, I have to act more mature. It just happens. . . . I just handle it."

But while some people were happy to see Capriati playing in numerous professional tournaments, many others were concerned that she was too young to handle the pressure. After all, there were many examples of promising young players who had been pushed too hard, too soon and ended up leaving the game early due to emotional or physical problems. Some observers worried that she would end up like former teen tennis sensations Andrea Jaeger and Tracy Austin. Both of these young stars left the tour at the age of 19 due to injuries and burnout. But Capriati dismissed comparisons to these former players. "It's like, you know, it's not my fault," she said of their problems. "Why does everybody think it's going to happen to me? How do they know what my limit is?"

Capriati continued her impressive play in 1991. She reached the semifinals at both the U.S. Open and Wimbledon that year, defeating four of the top five players in the world along the way. She also broke into the top ten in the world rankings, becoming the youngest woman ever to do so. By the end of her second season as a pro, Capriati's winnings and endorsement contracts made her the 26th-wealthiest athlete in the world.

Struggling under the Pressure

In 1992, however, Capriati began to show some signs of burnout. She suffered a series of injuries that reduced the level of her play and prevented her from winning a single tournament that year. She also lost her bubbly charm and became sullen and uncooperative with the media. Some observers began to wonder whether growing up in the media spotlight had started to take a toll on her.

Capriati denied that she was burned out on tennis. She claimed that she was simply going through adolescence, like other people her age. But she admitted feeling some resentment toward the public interest in her private life. "I think everyone goes through it, but I'm dealing with tennis, too," she stated. "Plus you've got the added pressure of trying to be accepted by your friends, dealing with math and chemistry teachers, and dealing with rules at home. I mean, it's a lot. Why does everyone care? I mean, everyone is so wrapped up in everyone else's lives. I understand up to a point, but enough is enough."

The one bright spot for Capriati in 1992 came when she represented the United States at the Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain. She defeated

Capriati after winning the Olympic gold medal, August 7, 1992.

Steffi Graf of Germany for the first time in her career to claim the Olympic gold medal in women's tennis.

Capriati continued to struggle in 1993. She gained weight, which slowed her down on the court, and she no longer appeared capable of beating the top players on the tour. In fact, she was eliminated in the quarterfinals in a series of Grand Slam events. She finally hit bottom when she lost to a relatively unknown player in the first round of the 1993 U.S. Open. Observers later said that it was clear that she was not prepared to play in the tournament. "At the end of the match I couldn't wait to get off the court," she recalled. "Totally, mentally, I just lost it, and obviously it goes deeper than that one match. I really was not happy with myself, my ten-

nis, my life, my parents, my coaches, my friends. . . . I spent a week in bed in darkness after that, just hating everything."

Trouble with the Law

Shortly after her early exit from the U.S. Open, Capriati announced that she was taking some time off from tennis in order to finish high school. Many people supported her decision, saying that she needed a break from the pressures of professional tennis. But it soon became clear that her problems ran deeper than that. In December 1993, she was arrested for shoplifting. Security guards at a Florida mall claimed that she had taken an inexpensive bracelet from a kiosk. Capriati said that she had made an innocent mistake—she had tried on several bracelets and simply forgotten to take one of them off.

Capriati hit bottom when she lost to a relatively unknown player in the first round of the 1993 U.S. Open. "At the end of the match I couldn't wait to get off the court. Totally, mentally, I just lost it, and obviously it goes deeper than that one match. I really was not happy with myself, my tennis, my life, my parents, my coaches, my friends. . . . I spent a week in bed in darkness after that, just hating everything."

Over the next few months, Capriati began to rebel against her parents' rules and other people's expectations. She began listening to grunge music, dying her hair, wearing black clothing and nail polish, and sporting a nose ring. As soon as she turned 18, she moved out of her parents' house to an apartment in Boca Raton, Florida. A short time later, she dropped out of high school. In May 1994, Capriati was arrested for possession of marijuana following a weekend of partying with other teenagers in a hotel room. Some of the other people present claimed that she had been drinking alcohol and using hard drugs as well. The unflattering police mug shot from her arrest appeared on television news programs and in newspapers across the country. A few days later, she checked into a drug rehabilitation program in Miami.

Capriati's downfall was big news in the world of tennis. She was dropped by all of her sponsors, and many people thought she would never play professionally again. Although no one tried to defend her behavior, some observers blamed her parents for pushing her so hard to succeed at such a

young age. They felt that Capriati's struggles to deal with her wealth and fame were inevitable, especially since she was facing the normal pressures of being a teenager at the same time. The WTA tour reacted to her arrest by changing its rules so that girls had to be 15 in order to play professional tennis.

Capriati attempted to make a comeback in November 1994. But she played only one match, which she lost, and then disappeared from the pro tour again. In 1995, her parents divorced. This decision saddened her, but she later admitted that her relationship with both parents improved after the divorce. Capriati started another comeback in February 1996 and managed to advance to the quarterfinals of a tournament in Germany. But the rest of the season proved disappointing. In May, she was eliminated in the first round of the French Open. In August, she was not allowed to defend her Olympic gold medal at the Atlanta Games because her world ranking was too low at 104.

Many observers felt that Capriati still was not serious about tennis. She seemed out of shape and tentative on the court. She also suffered a series of injuries that hampered her comeback attempt. "It's been frustrating," she stated. "Every time I get in shape and things are going well, something happens to set me back, like an injury." Off the court, Capriati did not seem any better equipped to deal with media attention. For example, she refused to talk about her time away from the tour. Since her world ranking was so low, she had to play qualifying matches or obtain special "wild card" invitations from event promoters to get into pro tournaments. As a result, she failed to make it past the quarterfinals of any tournament through 1998.

Committing Herself to Making a Comeback

In 1999, at the age of 23, Capriati finally committed herself to getting back in shape and attempting a real comeback on the professional tennis tour. "It came to a point where I had to decide to do something about my tennis or do something else," she explained. "I thought about other scenarios, doing other things, but came back to really wanting to play tennis. Stopping the game before giving myself a real chance would have ended up being my only regret in life."

The turning point for Capriati came when she hired former top-ten player Harold Solomon as her coach. "I was just sick of losing, or just not knowing why I was losing, or just feeling lost out there and not knowing really what to do," she noted. "And I just needed an outside perspective — someone from the outside looking in to help me see what's going on." Solomon convinced Capriati that she could still play top tennis if she was willing to

Capriati with the winner's trophy at the Australian Open, January 27, 2001.

work hard. He also provided more structure for her practices and placed her on a tough workout regimen.

It did not take long for Capriati to begin seeing the results of her efforts. She began practicing with Martina Hingis—the top-ranked player in the world, who had recently moved to Saddlebrook Resort—and realized that she could compete with the best. Then in May 1999, in Strasbourg, France, she won her first tournament in six years. "Winning Strasbourg boosted my confidence," she recalled. "I just felt confident about the whole thing. It was a start. I proved to myself I could win again."

At first, however, Capriati still had difficulty facing the media. She was reluctant to discuss the issues that led to her leaving the tour and the problems she experienced during her time away from tennis. Yet reporters asked her about these things constantly. Finally, after she was eliminated in the fourth round of the 1999 U.S. Open, Capriati held a press conference at which she read a prepared statement about her troubled past. "Yes, I made mistakes by rebelling, by acting out in confused ways. But it was all due to the fact I was very young and I was experiencing my adolescence. Most of you know how hard that can be. When you do it in front of the world, it is even harder," she revealed. "If I knew there would be so much pain in learning life's lessons, I would have been hesitant to take the path that I took." She told the press that it would be the last time that she would talk

about her difficult past, and reporters started to grill her. After answering some questions, she broke down in tears and left the press conference.

Breaking Through for a Grand Slam Victory

In 2000, Capriati and Solomon parted ways, and she started working with her father as her coach again. She grew lean and muscular from tough workouts that included running, cycling, and lifting weights. "I just started to enjoy the workouts more than dread them," she said. "I thought, it's going to get me in better shape, it's going to make me lose weight and it's going to make me look better. Once you start seeing the results, it's easy from that point." Capriati also started to show improvement on the tennis court, beating some of the top players and winning a few tournaments. She made it to the semifinals of the Australian Open—her best finish in a Grand Slam event in nine years—and climbed into the top 15 in the world rankings.

The turning point for Capriati came when she hired former top-ten player Harold Solomon as her coach. "I was just sick of losing, or just not knowing why I was losing, or just feeling lost out there and not knowing really what to do. And I just needed an outside perspective—someone from the outside looking in to help me see what's going on."

In January 2001, Capriati completed her remarkable comeback by winning the first Grand Slam event of her career. She entered the Australian Open as the 12th seed, but she played well and easily advanced to the quarterfinals. She beat Monica Seles (ranked number four in the world) in the quarterfinals, then defeated Lindsay Davenport (ranked number two) in the semifinals. In the finals, she faced Martina Hingis, the top-ranked player in the world. But Capriati refused to be intimidated. "I thought, 'Why be nervous? She has everything to lose. Just go for it,'" she remembered.

Capriati ended up winning the match in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3, to become the Australian Open champion. (In women's tennis, a player wins a match by defeating her opponent in 2 out of 3 sets, while men must win 3 of 5 sets. The first player to win 6 games usually wins the set, but if their margin of victory is less than 2 games, the set is decided by a tie-breaker. Shorthand notation is often used to show the score of a tennis match. For example, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 means that the player in question won the first set

by a score of 6 games to 2, lost the next set 4 games to 6, and came back to win the match in a third-set tie-breaker.)

After her impressive victory, Capriati exploded with joy. She jumped up and down, pumping her fist in the air and starting to cry. "I can't believe this is happening," she said afterward. "There is so much to say. I don't know where to begin. Who would have thought I'd ever make it here after so much has happened? If you believe, dreams do come true."

After her impressive victory in the 2001 Australian Open, Capriati exploded with joy. She jumped up and down, pumping her fist in the air and starting to cry. "I can't believe this is happening. There is so much to say. I don't know where to begin. Who would have thought I'd ever make it here after so much has happened? If you believe, dreams do come true."

Winning the Second Part of the Grand Slam

Following her victory in the Australian Open, Capriati climbed into the top 10 in the world for the first time since January 1994. By mid-2001, she had won two tournaments and been runner-up in three others, and she had been named WTA player of the month twice. "Before Australia I was slowly building my confidence," she noted. "Since then everything has changed. I walk on court now and really believe it's my territory. I know I can compete against anybody. I know I can beat anybody. I used to have a certain fear that I was a level below the best, that I didn't have what it takes to beat a number one in a Grand Slam. But winning a Grand Slam has changed all that. I feel I am going to win every match, that I belong there, no matter who I play."

In June 2001, Capriati showed her newfound confidence at the second Grand Slam event of the year, the French Open. She defeated Serena Williams and Martina Hingis on her way to the finals, where she faced the young Belgian player Kim Clijsters for the title. Capriati started off slowly in the match, losing the first set 1-6. But she came back to win the second set 6-4 to force a deciding third set. It ended up being the longest third set in the history of the French Open, as the two players battled for 76 minutes before Capriati finally prevailed, 12-10. "I was fighting until the end, fighting for my life out there," she said afterward. "I just wanted to win so bad. Afterward, everything paid off."

Capriati playing against Justine Henin in the semifinals at Wimbledon, July 5, 2001.

As soon as Capriati won the French Open, people began speculating about whether she would be able to win Wimbledon and the U.S. Open to complete the Grand Slam. In the history of professional tennis, only four women had won all four major tournaments in the same year. Capriati continued to play well at Wimbledon in July. She reached the quarterfinals, where she faced hard-hitting Serena Williams. Capriati lost the first set and trailed 5-0 in the second before she took nine games in a row and came back to win. In the semifinals, she played the up-and-coming Belgian player Justine Henin in the semifinals. Capriati looked strong early, but she ended up losing the match, 6-2, 4-6, 2-6. Although her dream of winning all four Grand Slam events fell short, she took the loss in stride. "I just put it all in perspective. It's really not a big deal to lose a tennis match. There are a lot worse things that could happen," she stated. "Everyone made a big deal out of the Grand Slam but me. It would have been nice, but I am still very happy with what I have achieved."

In August and September 2001, Capriati competed in the U.S. Open. She was relaxed, confident, and happy, a marked change from her 1999 appearance when she had tried to talk to reporters about her troubled past and had ended up in tears. In the quarterfinals, she pounded out a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Amerlie Mauresmo. "I'm very happy, joyous, ecstatic," Capriati

said at the time. "It's a great sense of satisfaction—and I'm very grateful, too." In the semifinals, she met up with Venus Williams, who had won at Wimbledon that year. Together, the two of them had won the three Grand Slam events of 2001. Capriati started out strong, powering her way to a 4-1 lead. But as the match wore on, she said, "I definitely ran out of gas." Williams rebounded and defeated her 6-4, 6-2. With that, Capriati was eliminated from the U.S. Open. In the finals, Venus Williams went on to defeat her sister, Serena Williams.

"I don't regret anything that happened in my career, except that maybe 14 is too young to handle everything emotionally. But I know I don't want to leave tennis the way I did, crying and crawling away. I had become my own worst enemy. I started believing all the negative things that I was hearing about myself. But away from tennis, I started to see myself as the kind of person my family and friends saw. Tennis became not so much of a big deal, so I was able to relax and really enjoy playing."

Despite her loss at the U.S. Open, Capriati was happy about the year and looking forward to the future. "[It's] been a great season. I'm glad I ended it the way I did," she said. "It just gives me an incentive to come back next year and try to win the [events] that I haven't won. So that's still a goal that I have. I'm definitely going to look back on this year. It's going to be one of the greatest ones of my life."

Gaining Perspective on Her Troubled Youth

As she finally reached her potential on the tennis court in 2001, Capriati also seemed more mature off the court. For example, she began discussing her troubled youth and her time away from tennis more openly. "I don't regret anything that happened in my career, except that maybe 14 is too young to handle everything emotionally. But I know I don't want to leave tennis the way I did, crying and crawling away," she acknowledged. "I had become my own worst enemy. I started believing all the negative things that I was hearing about myself. But away from tennis, I started to see myself as the kind of person my family and friends saw. Tennis became not so much of a big deal, so I was able to relax and really enjoy playing."

Capriati believes that the passage of time also enabled her to gain a new perspective on life. "I realized a lot of things by myself and worked them out. I am no longer afraid of the world and don't look at it as a dark, scary place. I am in control, that's the difference these days. . . . There are still ups and downs, of course, like with anybody. Not every day is going to be perfect," she continued. "I'm not going to let anything change me, change what I do or who I am. You know, I'm always going to do what I want. . . . I'll just always stick to what makes me comfortable."

Capriati also expresses great confidence that more success awaits her on the tennis court. "I'm fortunate that I started when I was so young because I am still young now. A lot of time has gone by, but I still have a lot of time left," she concluded. "I am playing the greatest tennis that I have ever played. Each match, I just get stronger and gain more confidence. Everything is working for me. I feel like I have a real all-around game, and I do feel I can beat anybody."

HOME AND FAMILY

Capriati, who is not married, lives in a 4,380-square-foot home in Saddlebrook, an exclusive tennis community in Wesley Chapel, Florida. Her father remains her coach and accompanies her on the WTA tour. Her mother lives in Florida and they see each other often. She is also close to her brother, Steven, who plays tennis for the University of Arizona. When he returns to Florida, they often work out and practice together.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Capriati enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and watching movies. Her favorite movies are *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Shining*.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Rookie of the Year (*Tennis Magazine*): 1990
Olympic Singles Tennis: 1992, gold medal
Comeback Player of the Year (*Tennis Magazine*): 1999
Australian Open, Women's Singles: 2001
French Open, Women's Singles: 2001

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http://www.wtatour.com
http://www.usopen.org

Stacy Dragila 1971-

American Pole Vaulter
Winner of a Gold Medal in the 2000 Olympics

BIRTH

Stacy Dragila (pronounced drah-GHEE-lah) was born Stacy Mikaelsen on March 25, 1971, in Auburn, California. Her father, Bill, was a farmer and butcher, while her mother, Irma, stayed home to take care of Stacy and her two older brothers.

YOUTH

Dragila grew up on a 34-acre farm in northern California, where her family raised cattle and other animals. Since no

other girls lived nearby, Dragila played with her brothers and became a tomboy. She enjoyed climbing trees and riding her family's cows in the pasture. "I wasn't a daredevil, but I would try almost anything as a kid," she recalled. "I played with guys all the time. I had Barbies, but they were few and far between. Life was more about fights and running and hiding from boys in the woods."

Throughout her youth, Dragila was a member of the 4-H Club and participated in rodeo sports. Her best event was goat tying, in which contestants on horseback chase a goat around a ring, dismount, flip the goat onto its back, and tie its legs together. Her success in this event earned her the nickname "goat roper."

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EDUCATION

Dragila attended Alta Vista Elementary School, E.V. Cain Middle School, and Placer High School in Auburn. In addition to rodeo, she also competed in track during her high school years. "I tried everything," she remembered. "I liked the relays, I tried the hurdles, and I played around with the long jump a little bit." She was a good enough athlete to earn an invitation to the state championship track meet during her senior year.

It was during her high school years that Dragila first became interested in pole vaulting. In the track and field event known as the pole vault, athletes run at full speed while carrying a long, flexible pole. At the end of the runway, they plant the end of the pole in a small box set into the ground. Holding the other end, they use the pole to launch themselves high into the air. The pole vaulter's goal is to propel his or her body over the top of a crossbar that rests gently between two uprights or stanchions. The winner of the pole vault event is the athlete who goes the highest without knocking down the crossbar. Each competitor gets three attempts to clear each height, and ties go to the vaulter with the fewest misses or fewest attempts in clearing the winning height. Pole vaulting requires a wide range of athletic abilities, including speed, coordination, timing, strength, body control, and courage.

At that time, American high schools and colleges only allowed men to compete in pole vault. Dragila was intrigued by the event. But when she walked over to the pole vault area and asked the boys about the event, they discouraged her. "I had friends who were pole vaulters," she noted. "When I mentioned that I wanted to try it, one of them said not to bother, that women didn't have enough strength to do it." Stung by their attitude, Dragila abandoned her thoughts of pole vaulting for several years.

After graduating from Placer High in 1990, Dragila attended Yuba College in Marysville, California. She played on the Yuba volleyball team and continued to participate in track. During her college years, she trained for the heptathlon—a competition consisting of seven track events, including the high jump, long jump, shot put, javelin throw, 100 meter hurdles, 200 meter sprint, and 800 meter run. In 1992, Dragila transferred to Idaho State University in Pocatello on a track scholarship. She represented the school as a heptathlete for the next two years, until she graduated in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in physical education. Since that time, she has taken courses toward a master's degree in health education.

"When you run as fast as you can, carry that big pole in your hands, put it in that silly box in the ground, jump into the air that first time, it's not at all like pole vaulting. You just hold on for dear life and hope to get over the bar. The first couple trillion times trying to get over the bar were pretty frightening for me."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Learning to Pole Vault

Dragila's first attempt at pole vaulting came in 1993, when she was a member of the Idaho State track team. She tried it one day during track practice on a challenge from her coach, Dave Nielsen, who was a former college pole vaulter. She found her first pole vaulting experience to be somewhat scary. "Dave had a bunch of us heptathletes pick up a stick and try to go over six feet," she recalled. "When you run as fast as you can, carry that big pole in your hands, put it in that silly box in the ground, jump into the air that first time, it's not at all like pole vaulting. You just hold on for dear life and hope to get over the bar. The first couple trillion times trying to get over the bar were pretty frightening for me."

At first, Dragila wondered why Nielsen wanted her to try a new event. After all, women did not compete in the pole vault in the United States at

Dragila setting a world record height of 15 feet, 2½ inches at the Millrose Games, February 2, 2001.

that time. But her coach knew that the women's pole vault was quickly gaining popularity in Europe, and he felt it was just a matter of time before it caught on in the United States as well. As it turned out, he was right. Within five years, there were 20,000 American women participating in the pole vault. It was added to the list of events included in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Track and Field Championships in 1998, and it was included at the World Track and Field Championships a year later.

Nielsen thought that Dragila could succeed in the event if she got an early start. "She wasn't a natural, but if there is one thing she is, she is aggressive. She is determined," the coach stated. "There was something about the thrill and the experience that certainly caught her." Before long, Dragila spent most of her time training in the pole vault. On Nielsen's advice, she began lifting weights to increase her upper-body strength. She also began working with a gymnastics coach to improve her body control and become more comfortable flying through the air. "When I started vaulting, what held me back was fear of going upside down and not knowing where I was in the air," she explained. "I went to a gym and did some stuff on a trampoline to get a better handle on it."

Improving at a Rapid Rate

In 1994, Dragila cleared a height of ten feet in the pole vault. Sometime later, a friend showed her a copy of *Track and Field News* that said she had set an American record for a woman in the event. In addition, the article noted that her mark was only a foot and a half away from the women's

world record. Surprised by her early success, Dragila dedicated herself to becoming a champion pole vaulter. She also began working to get the women's pole vault recognized as an official track and field event. She hoped that it would be included in the Olympics for the first time at the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia. "I want to be ready when pole vaulting is in the Olympics," she stated. "Getting there is one of my goals. I think about it every day." In the meantime, Dragila worked at a restaurant in Pocatello while her husband, Brent Dragila, finished his degree at Idaho State.

In 1995, Dragila qualified for the U.S. National Outdoor Championships in the pole vault. She was thrilled to be competing at the same meet with such great athletes as Carl Lewis and Jackie Joyner-Kersee. In fact, Dragila became so nervous that she forgot to switch poles when she went from her short-approach practice jump to her long-approach competition jump. The result was one of the most embarrassing moments of her track career. "You're supposed to switch poles when you go to a full approach because the pole bends a lot more," she noted. "But I forgot, and I bent it too far, and I shot all the way off the pit." But Dragila overcame her embarrassment and finished second in the competition. Based on her performance in the U.S. championships, she was invited to compete in a series of meets in Europe. "I had the greatest time of my life, and I came back hungry to jump higher and higher," she remembered.

> ***"When I started vaulting, what held me back was fear of going upside down and not knowing where I was in the air. I went to a gym and did some stuff on a trampoline to get a better handle on it."***

In 1996, Dragila increased the height of her best jump by nearly 20 inches. In January 1997, she became the first American women to clear over 14 feet in the pole vault. Over the next five weeks, she improved her record five times. Then, in March, she tied the world record of 14 feet, 5 1/8 inches. At this time, the women's pole vault was such a new event that records were falling almost every day. "It's really neat to be a pioneer in women's pole vault and see where it's going," Dragila stated. She completed her outstanding year by winning the world indoor pole vault title, with a jump equal to her shared world record. She was supposed to get $25,000 in prize money for winning the championship, but the meet's sponsor withheld the cash. It turned out that the bib Dragila wore showing her entry number had been folded over so that the sponsor's name was not visible.

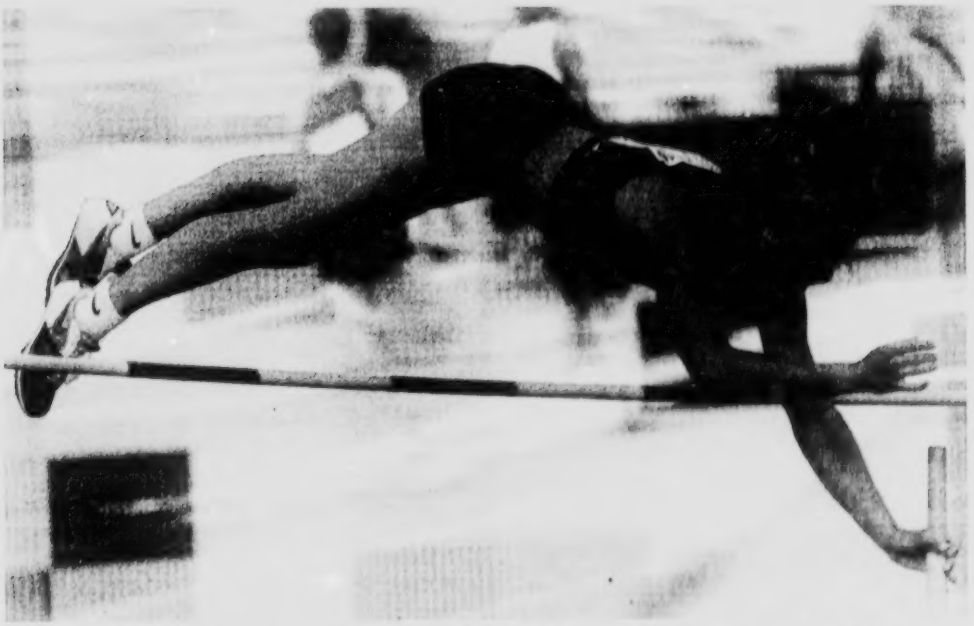
She finally received the prize money after writing a letter of apology to the company.

By the start of the 1998 season, Dragila had increased her best pole vault by five feet in five years. She seemed poised to dominate the relatively new sport. But she had a tough year in 1998, with disappointing finishes in several important track meets. She suffered from a mysterious pain in her foot that was first diagnosed as tendinitis. But Dragila knew that the problem was more serious when she failed to clear the opening height at the Goodwill Games. "That's when I swore, 'There's something really wrong with my foot,'" she recalled. "I think I can tolerate pain pretty well, but this was excruciating pain, like someone was stabbing me. It was frustrating, because it was a whole year of crappy jumping." After more tests, Dragila finally learned that she had a stress fracture in her foot. She had surgery to repair it in September 1998, and she returned to training in February 1999.

"As the Olympics approached, Dragila received a great deal of attention—especially from NBC, the television network that broadcast the 2000 Games. "You can tell that NBC has really picked her up as a golden girl of sorts," her coach said. "They like her. She's a personality. She's somebody that people are going to watch and say, 'Ooh, yeah, I'd like to know that person.' And the event itself has endeared itself to a lot of female athletes. They see somebody who's athletic and good-looking, in an event that's a little bit X-Games . . . that just has a natural attraction for a lot of people."

A few months later, Dragila became the first American woman to clear 15 feet in the pole vault. At the 1999 World Outdoor Track and Field Championships, she tied the world record held by Australian Emma George with a jump of 15 feet, 1 inch. In March 2000, Dragila leapt past George with a vault of 15 feet, 1¾ inches at the U.S. Indoor Track and Field Championships. She earned a bonus of $50,000 for her accomplishment. As the world champion and world record holder, Dragila became one of the favorites for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, where women's pole vault would be included as a medal sport for the first time.

But the pressure of being the favorite seemed to affect Dragila. Her performances in the months leading up to the Olympics became very inconsis-



Dragila launching over the bar at a competition in France, July 9, 2001.

tent. In April, for example, she failed to make the opening height of 12 feet, 11½ inches at a meet in California. "It was windy, but I've got to be able to handle that," she said afterward. "When it's windy out, maybe that's when I need to go jump in training—not wait for some perfect day." Frustrated, Dragila looked for a way to calm her nerves and face the pressure of the upcoming Olympics. "There were so many little things that were bugging me that had never bugged me before, but now all of a sudden they were, and I was feeling like I was just getting really irritated," she explained. She ended up going to a sports psychologist who helped her visualize success and overcome her fear of failure. A few months later, at the U.S. Olympic Track and Field trials, she increased her world record height to 15 feet, 2¼ inches.

Winning the Olympic Gold Medal

As the Olympics approached, Dragila received a great deal of attention—especially from NBC, the television network that broadcast the 2000 Games. "You can tell that NBC has really picked her up as a golden girl of sorts," her coach said. "They like her. She's a personality. She's somebody that people are going to watch and say, 'Ooh, yeah, I'd like to know that person.' And the event itself has endeared itself to a lot of female athletes. They see somebody who's athletic and good-looking, in an event that's a little bit X-Games . . . that just has a natural attraction for a lot of people."

Dragila was featured in several national magazines, and she appeared in a television commercial for Visa. She also created some controversy by posing semi-nude in an Olympic calendar for charity. She was pictured wearing thigh-length boots, leather gloves, and strategically placed body paint.

The Olympic women's pole vault competition took place on September 25, 2000. It soon became clear that the top women vaulters felt the pressure of their first appearance in the Games. One of Dragila's main rivals, former world record holder Emma George of Australia, failed to qualify for the finals. Dragila herself struggled in the early rounds. She missed on her first attempt at 14 feet, 5¼ inches, then missed twice at 14 feet, 9 inches before clearing the height on her final attempt. With George out of the competition, the huge crowd of over 100,000 people in Sydney turned their attention to another Australian vaulter, Tatiana Grigorieva. "It was piercing," Dragila said of the cheers for Grigorieva. "I was just trying to get a couple of claps as I went down the runway."

The competition was intense as both Dragila and Grigorieva cleared 14 feet, 11 inches. Then, on her first attempt, the American sailed over a bar set at 15 feet, 1 inch. Grigorieva missed one attempt at that height, then decided to play mind games with Dragila. The Australian passed on her next two attempts at 15 feet, 1 inch in order to attempt a world record vault of 15 feet, 3 inches. Dragila made three attempts at this height, and barely missed on her third try. Grigorieva missed on both of her attempts, allowing Dragila to clinch the win with her earlier height of 15 feet, 1 inch. With that jump, Dragila was awarded the 2000 Olympic gold medal in women's pole vault, the first gold medal ever awarded in the sport. The Australian picked up the silver with a vault of 14 feet, 11 inches, and Vala Flosadottir of Iceland collected the bronze to become the first woman from her country to win a track and field medal.

Even though she struggled during the medal competition, Dragila was thrilled with the result. "It wasn't one of my better competitions. I had to battle through it. I had to keep my head on my shoulders. The competition was thrilling and I had to dig a little deeper to finish what I came to do," she stated. "The gold medal is beyond any world record. To make history, I don't think there's anything better. To take up the pole vault seven years ago and to be here with a gold medal tonight is unreal. I just never imagined this when I went to the pole vault pit and tried it out."

Winning the Olympic gold medal turned Dragila into an instant celebrity. She was amazed at all the attention she received from the media and fans. In the weeks following the Games, she visited the White House, appeared on "Hollywood Squares" and "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," was pic-

tured on a Wheaties cereal box, and had a street named after her on the Idaho State campus. She and her husband, Brent Dragila, tried to enjoy all the attention. "We planned to go sightseeing for two weeks after the Games, but as soon as I won, people were calling and asking if I can do this or that," Dragila recalled. "Part of me wanted to crawl under a rock and catch my breath. But Brent and I thought we should just enjoy this, meet people, and get the sponsorships lined up."

String of Successes Continues

Thanks to her multiple world records and Olympic gold medal, Dragila won the Jesse Owens Award as the most outstanding American track and field athlete of 2000. She also was named women's pole vaulter of the 20th century by *Track and Field News*. Not content to rest on past successes, Dragila continued her string of impressive performances in 2001. In February, she broke her own world record for an indoor pole vault with a jump of 15 feet, 5 inches. Two months later, she set a new outdoor world record at the same height. In June, she raised her outdoor world record to 15 feet, 9¼ inches. "That's the nature of the event," she stated. "It's so young, so new, that a world record could go down on any vault. That makes it exciting for spectators and exciting for athletes." In fact, Dragila and five other elite female vaulters broke or tied the world record 30 times between 1991 and 2000.

> *Dragila was thrilled when she won the 2000 Olympic gold medal. "The gold medal is beyond any world record. To make history, I don't think there's anything better. To take up the pole vault seven years ago and to be here with a gold medal tonight is unreal. I just never imagined this when I went to the pole vault pit and tried it out."*

During the 2001 season, Dragila began making the transition to using a longer pole and a longer approach run. Her goal is to break the 16-foot barrier. "Two years ago, nobody thought we could jump 14 feet. Then it was 15 feet. Now, we're going for 16. It's fun to be part of something where you're pushing the edge all the time," she noted. "I admit that the women aren't anywhere near the men's record [of 20 feet], but I think the other vaulters and I have proven women can do anything. We're just setting the stage for younger female athletes who will come after us and take the sport to new places." However, Dragila was disappointed to learn of a

Dragila on the descent after clearing the bar in the World Championships, August 4, 2001. She won the event and claimed the world title with a vault of 15 feet, 7 inches.

rule change that took effect in July 2001. Under the new rule, pole vaulters get only two attempts at each height instead of three. It was one of several rule changes designed to shorten the length of track meets. "A true track fan enjoys the suspense of a second or third attempt. It comes down to crunch time and who's going to make it or not," she explained. "I don't want to take away the third attempt. I'm just firing up on that third attempt."

In August 2001, Dragila won her second consecutive pole vault world championship. In an exciting contest, she outlasted Russian Svetlanta Feofanova to claim the world title with a vault of 15 feet, 7 inches. Both women cleared the winning height, but Dragila won because she had one less miss at lower heights. "I was just lucky to stay one step ahead of everybody again," she said afterward. "When you have someone on your heels like that, making each attempt right after you do, it's always awesome for the sport."

Between performance bonuses and endorsements from such companies as Nike, Oakley, Visa, and General Motors, Dragila has been able to make a comfortable living as a pole vaulter. She also works as an assistant track coach at Idaho State in Pocatello, where she lives and does most of her training. Despite all her successes, Dragila remains humble. She is known for being friendly, and she is so enthusiastic about her sport that she even cheers on her competitors. "All the trash talk that the others do is such a waste of time. It's nice to show kids that we can do it without getting nasty. I mean, it's still about having fun," she stated. "To have that ego and be real tense just doesn't seem like fun to me."

"Dragila is known for being friendly, and she is so enthusiastic about her sport that she even cheers on her competitors. "All the trash talk that the others do is such a waste of time. It's nice to show kids that we can do it without getting nasty. I mean, it's still about having fun. To have that ego and be real tense just doesn't seem like fun to me."

In many ways, Dragila has become an ambassador for the young sport of women's pole vaulting. She competes frequently, makes lots of promotional appearances, spends hours signing autographs, and enjoys encouraging her young fans. "I'm living proof that an athlete who wasn't awesome in a sport can work hard and become an Olympic gold medalist. Seven years ago, when I ran down the runway for the first time, I was very frightened. Then, being upside down way up in the air like that, whoa, that was scary. I just curled up into a ball and fell into the pit. To come this far, and see our sport gaining popularity, is just awesome," she said. "It's a great position to be in. I've gotten tons of fan mail. Girls are still afraid to come up to me unless they know me, but I get tons of fan mail and e-mail from girls asking questions. They're encouraged because I came to it when I was so old in my career. I think they know now anything is possible if they put their heart into it. They can achieve a lot of

things where men and other women have put barriers on them. I just encourage them to go out there and keep trying to do whatever they love."

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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Stacy Mikaelsen married her high school sweetheart, Brent Dragila, in 1993, when they were both students at Idaho State. A former U.S. Marine who served in the Persian Gulf War, Brent earned a degree in criminal justice and worked for the California Highway Patrol. Today, they live in Pocatello, Idaho, where Stacy trains and works as an assistant track coach at Idaho State.

Although Brent is very supportive of his wife's athletic career, he sometimes feels overwhelmed by Stacy's hectic schedule. "I still get taken aback by all that's going on," he admitted. "I go to meets with her and see all the attention she gets from the press, and all the people calling, wanting her to do stuff all the time. And this is just the beginning." The Dragilas plan to have children once Stacy retires from pole vaulting. "Sometimes I get down about doing so much and not seeing my friends, and they are all starting families, and it's like their kids are going to be baby-sitting my kids someday," Stacy noted. "But you have to make sacrifices to make things happen."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In between training and making public appearances, Dragila enjoys mountain biking and tennis. "My husband and I really enjoy riding our mountain bikes up in the hills here, taking our dogs out and getting away from the hustle and bustle. It's kind of nice to get up there and not think

Dragila swimming with the dolphins in Australia on August 31, 2001.

about all the things that I think about every day," she stated. "We also play tennis. I don't really call it 'playing' tennis. We chase the ball around quite a bit, but it's a great activity and I really don't think about exercising when I'm out there. Doing other activities but still being active is fun for me." Dragila is also involved in charity work for several organizations, including Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

HONORS AND AWARDS

U.S. Indoor Pole Vault Champion: 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000
U.S. Outdoor Pole Vault Champion: 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000
World Indoor Pole Vault Champion: 1997
World Outdoor Pole Vault Champion: 1999, 2001
Olympic Pole Vault: 2000, gold medal
Jesse Owens Award: 2000, for most outstanding athlete of the year
Women's Pole Vaulter of the 20th Century (*Track and Field News*): 2000

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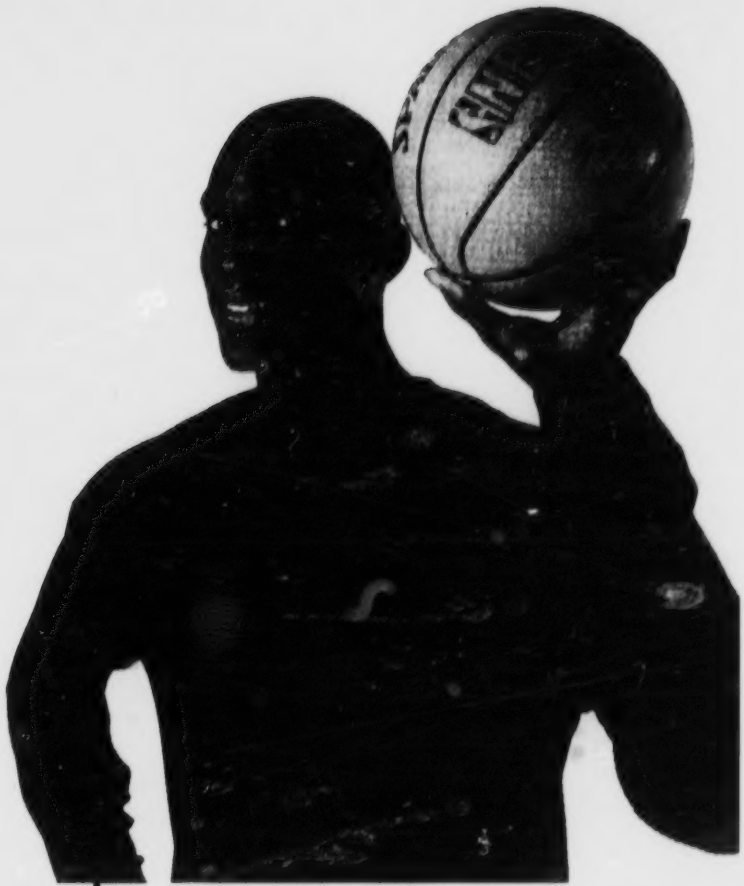
WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.stacydragila.com
http://www.usatf.org
http://www.isu.edu/athletic/STACY.HTM



Kevin Garnett 1976-

American Professional Basketball Player with the Minnesota Timberwolves
Five-Time NBA All-Star

BIRTH

Kevin Garnett was born on May 19, 1976, in Greenville, South Carolina. His parents, O'Lewis McCullough and Shirley Garnett, were not married. Garnett has an older sister, Sonya, and a younger sister, Ashley. When Garnett was five, his mother married Ernest Irby, who became his stepfather. Garnett continued to live with his mother and stepfather, but he remained in contact with his biological father throughout his childhood.

When Garnett was 12, his mother and stepfather moved the family to the small town of Mauldin, South Carolina.

YOUTH

When Garnett was young, he could often be found playing basketball. His father, O'Lewis McCullough, had been an outstanding player in his younger days and shared a love of the game with his son. Garnett's stepfather, on the other hand, did not like the game at all. He even refused to put up a backboard and hoop in the family's driveway. To play the game he loved, Garnett had to go to a nearby city park, where he spent hours each day shooting baskets.

Garnett recalled that playing basketball made him feel good as a child. "When I didn't have a friend, when I was lonely, I always knew that I could grab that orange ball and go [play] hoops. I could always make a basket and feel better."

It was not until he moved to Mauldin that Garnett began to get serious about basketball. At age 12, Garnett was tall at 5 feet, 10 inches—but not exceptionally tall for someone who was determined to make a living playing basketball. In addition, he had not yet shown the talent that would make him a superstar. He was "a lanky kid with no skills," remembered boyhood friend Baron (Bear) Franks. Still, his friend noted, "all he did was talk about basketball. And every time you saw him, he had a ball. Sun up. Sun down. Up and down the street. All day long." Garnett recalled that playing basketball made him feel good as a child. "When I didn't have a friend, when I was lonely, I always knew that I could grab that orange ball and go [play] hoops," he explained. "I could always make a basket and feel better."

Garnett was part of a group of about ten boys who lived on or near Beachwood Drive in Mauldin. The boys, most of whom are still friends as adults, did everything together. "We're like one big family," Garnett said of his childhood buddies. "We know each other's faults. We played ball together, we grew up with each other. We're like brothers." Part of the reason Garnett spent so much time with his group of friends was that it allowed him to avoid going home, where his relationship with his stepfather was growing more strained. "He was always looking for a father figure to tell him about basketball," remembered Franks. "Kevin was happy-go-lucky,

polite, always greeted people. But every time I saw his stepfather, it was like walking on eggshells. I think Kevin felt he was better off not being around his stepfather."

Garnett's mother divorced Irby in 1996 after 13 years of marriage. But she shared her ex-husband's feelings about Garnett's devotion to basketball. It was not until high school, when she realized that he had a realistic chance to play professional basketball, that she fully supported his love of the game. "I'm an advocate of education," she explained. "I always saved for my children's college education. My plans were for him to go to school. . . . I think he would have made a great social worker."

With his mother and stepfather opposed to his interest in basketball, it fell to Garnett's biological father to aid in his development as a player. McCullough was a star center and shot-blocker on his high school team, but he never made it to the college level. Instead, he married and raised a family. McCullough often asked Garnett to visit him in the summer. During those visits, he helped his son work on his basketball skills.

Garnett knew that to make it at the college and pro level, he would have to work on all of his skills. And even though he was getting taller every month, he did not just work on short shots and rebounding like most big players. Instead, Garnett worked on all aspects of the game—dribbling, shooting, passing, and defense. He wanted to be a complete player.

EDUCATION

No matter what school he attended, basketball always came first for Garnett, with schoolwork a distant second. He was not a bad student, and he was obviously smart, but he only seemed to apply himself when a class caught his attention. Once, while giving a history report in high school, he kept stopping his presentation to ask teacher Janie Willoughby if he had done enough to earn a "B" on the report. He fully intended to stop giving his report once Willoughby said yes, but she did not let Garnett off the hook. Instead, she made him give the whole report.

Garnett attended Mauldin High School, where he shot up in height, growing a foot during his time there. By the time his high school career ended, he would be almost seven feet tall. As he matured physically, he also matured on the court, taking his game to a higher level. "I knew he was gifted the first time I saw him on the court," said Mauldin Coach James (Duke) Fisher.

Garnett played well during his freshman season at Mauldin, but his numbers were not overwhelming. He averaged just under 13 points per game,

along with 14 rebounds and 7 blocked shots. During the off-season, Garnett pushed himself to improve on the court. "He'd leave one practice and go practice again," Fisher recalled of his fast-improving star. "I never saw someone so obsessed."

During the summers, Garnett chose to play American Athletic Union (AAU) basketball, joining the team coached by South Carolina coaching legend Darren (Bull) Gazaway. Garnett played for Gazaway for three seasons, and the third season was truly special. That year, the team was composed entirely of players that had been voted the most valuable player on their high school team. But even though the roster was full of stars, Garnett was clearly the best player on the team.

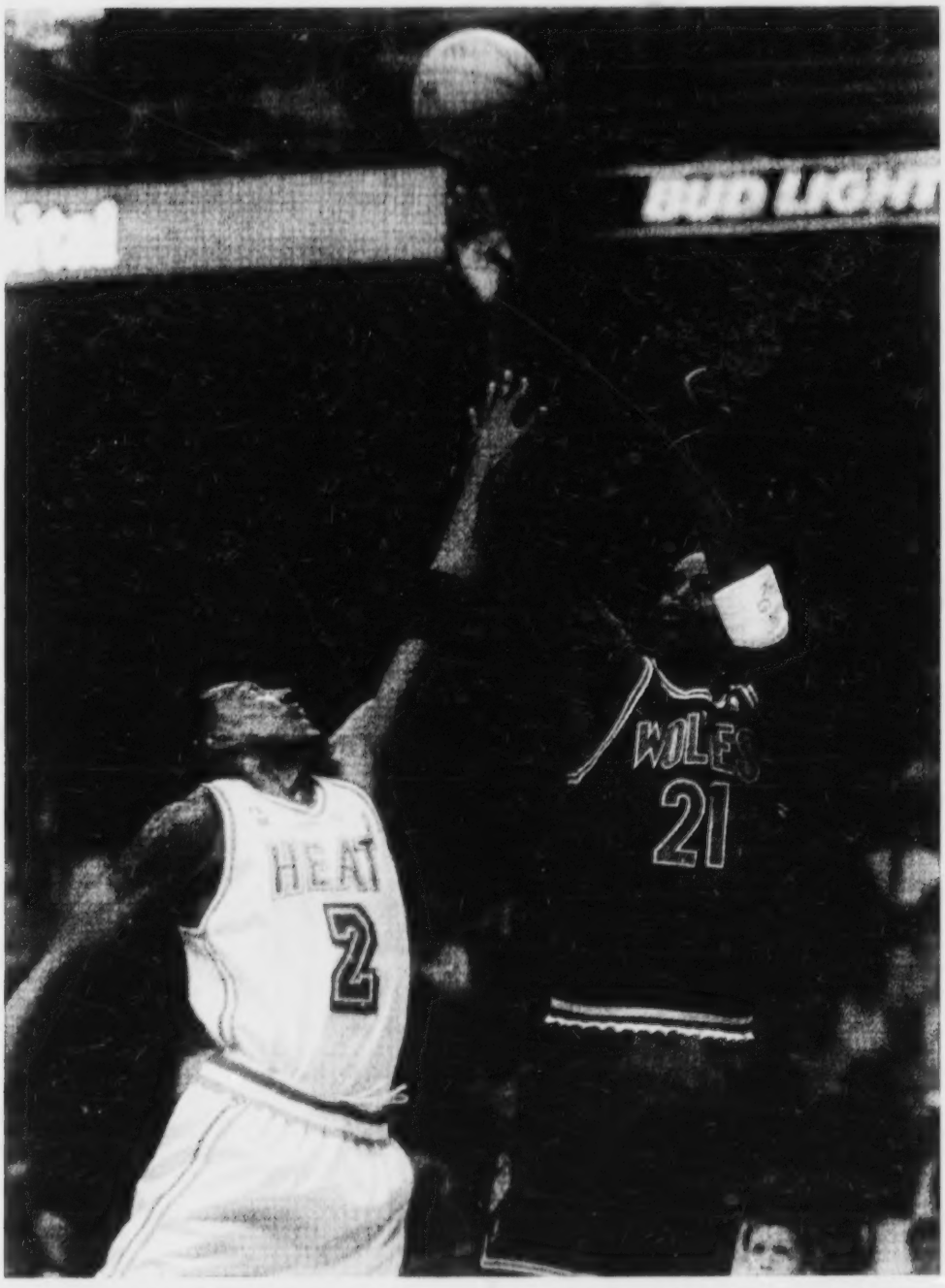
"I knew he was gifted the first time I saw him on the court," said James (Duke) Fisher, Garnett's coach at Mauldin High School, who noticed how Garnett pushed himself to improve on the court. "He'd leave one practice and go practice again. I never saw someone so obsessed."

As a sophomore at Mauldin, Garnett began to attract the attention of college scouts. His mailbox soon overflowed with introductory letters from the top college basketball programs from all over the United States. Overwhelmed by the flood of mail, Garnett asked his favorite history teacher, Janie Willoughby, to help him keep all the incoming letters straight.

During Garnett's junior season at Mauldin, the Mavericks made it to the South Carolina upper-level state championship game. Garnett averaged 27 points, 17 rebounds, and 7 blocked shots per game. He was named Mr. Basketball in South Carolina, an award given to the best player in the state. Unfortunately, Garnett's life was about to become more difficult.

Violent Incident Creates Problems

In May of his junior season, Garnett had been in the area of a large fight in which a white student was injured. Garnett was one of five African-American players charged with second-degree lynching, a charge which includes simple assault. He has never spoken in-depth about the incident, but onlookers who saw the fight say that he was not involved in the brawl and that he did not hurt the white student. "Just knowing Kevin



Garnett (21) shooting over the head of Keith Haskins (2) of the Miami Heat, March 5, 1996.

like I do," said Murray Long, one of his basketball teammates, "I don't think he would ever do anything to hurt anyone, and I never understood why the whole thing was made such a big deal."

Because of his young age and clean record, Garnett was offered an intervention program. Under this arrangement, the charges against him would be dropped if he agreed to undergo counseling and perform volunteer work. After completing the program, he agreed with his mother that perhaps it was time to move away from Mauldin. Garnett was hurt that so few of the people he thought were his friends had supported him when he was arrested, and he felt that his relationship with the Mauldin fans had been damaged forever. The troubled star had his pick of the top high school basketball programs around the country. He decided that he had enjoyed playing for William Nelson at a Nike summer basketball camp, and that he would like to play for Nelson's team at Farragut Academy in Chicago, Illinois.

"Kevin's ability, unselfishness, and work ethic set him apart from other talented players," said William Nelson, Garnett's coach at Farragut Academy. "He was so unselfish, trying to get other players involved. So many superstar players are selfish."

While it may seem strange that Garnett's family moved from South Carolina to Illinois so that he could play basketball, his mother did not see it that way. "I had to save him," she said of the move. But Garnett's move to Farragut was not without controversy. Opposing coaches and players accused Nelson of recruiting Garnett to move to Chicago, a practice that is accepted in college but that is discouraged in high school. Even worse, some people accused Nelson and Garnett's mother of accepting money from Nike to bring Garnett to Chicago and make him a star. In response to the allegations, Nelson pointed out that Garnett was a star in the making without Nike's help.

At Farragut, Garnett was teammates with Ronnie Fields, one of the best guards in the country. The two were perhaps the best scoring combination in the entire country. "Kevin and Ronnie — it was like they were rock stars, it was like a . . . circus," recalls Nelson of his two superstar athletes. "I was talking to sports agents, scouts, coaches, media people. Literally, 80 percent of the calls coming into the school were for me."

Garnett did not enjoy living in Chicago. "There were gangs, guns, crime," he recalled. "It was no fun." But he became the star he was expected to be on the court. With Garnett and Fields leading the way, Farragut was one of the best teams in Illinois. The Admirals finished 28-2 and advanced all the

way to the quarterfinal round of the state tournament. Garnett averaged 26 points, 18 rebounds, 7 assists, and 6 blocked shots per game. He was named Mr. Basketball in Illinois, as well as the national high school player of the year by *USA Today*. "Kevin's ability, unselfishness, and work ethic set him apart from other talented players," Nelson stated. "He was so unselfish, trying to get other players involved. So many superstar players are selfish."

From High School to the NBA

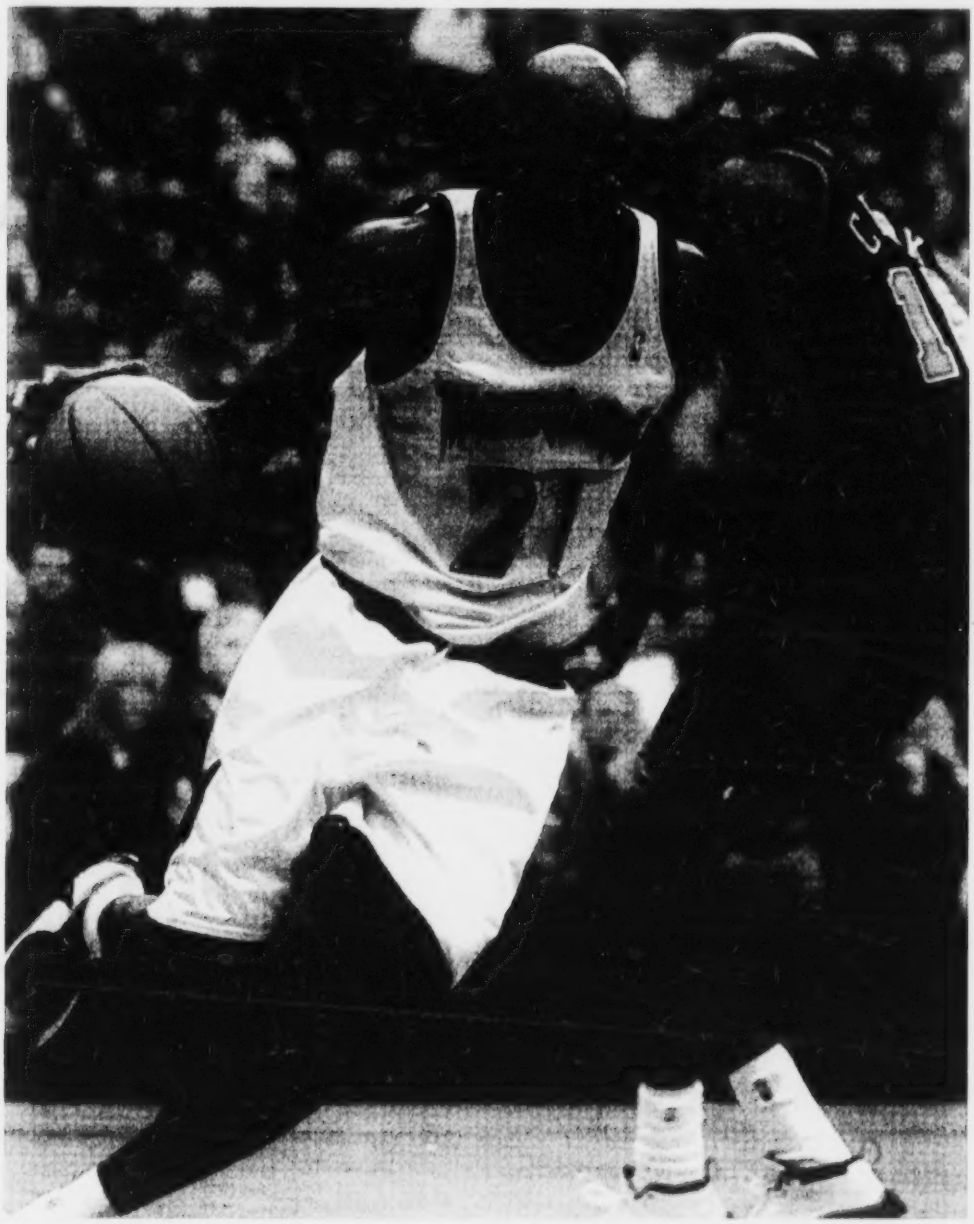
Garnett's on-court success was not always matched by his off-court performance in the classroom. While he did manage to increase his grades once he moved to Chicago — averaging 3.8 on a 4-point scale in his core pre-college classes — he had a great deal of trouble taking the standardized American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), two exams that were required to enroll in college. After earning poor scores on the exams several times, Garnett decided that college simply was not for him. It was a tough decision, as he truly wanted to play college basketball. "I was in a bind," he remembered. "I wanted to go to college. I wanted to have options."

Instead, Garnett chose the only option he thought was available to him and decided to take the incredibly risky step of skipping college and jumping straight to the National Basketball Association (NBA). At that point, it was a move few high school players had ever attempted. But Garnett decided to make the most of the experience. "Wherever I go [in the NBA] it'll be an opportunity," he said before the draft. "Millions of kids want to play pro basketball, and here I am getting the chance early. I learned one thing — never hate a positive option." Ironically, after announcing that he would skip college to play in the NBA, Garnett learned that he had finally succeeded on the ACT exam. By that time, however, his mind was made up. He graduated from Farragut Academy in 1995 and made himself available for the NBA draft.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

NBA — The Minnesota Timberwolves

In 1995, Garnett became just the fifth player ever to make the jump directly from high school to the NBA when he was selected by the Minnesota Timberwolves with the fifth pick in the first round of the NBA draft. Nearly seven feet tall, Garnett was expected to play power forward in the NBA. However, he could legitimately play every position on the floor, in-



Garnett (21) driving past Keon Clark of the Denver Nuggets, February 15, 2000.

cluding point guard (the ball control position usually reserved for shorter, quicker players). In this respect he was similar to his favorite NBA player, Magic Johnson. But Johnson was only 6 feet, 9 inches tall. No seven-footer had ever entered the NBA with the variety of skills that Garnett possessed.

After the draft, Garnett wasted no time in signing his first contract with the T-Wolves, as the Minnesota team is known. He agreed to a three-year

deal worth $5.6 million. Unlike other professional leagues, the NBA strictly regulates rookie salaries, so Garnett's contract was essentially set based on his draft position. In return for giving up their right to negotiate bigger initial salaries, NBA players are allowed to become "free agents" much earlier in their professional careers. Free agents can sign to play with any team they desire, and the top ones sign huge contracts. That league rule would have a huge impact on Garnett once his initial contract expired.

Garnett's first season with the Timberwolves was both frustrating and promising. For the first half of the season, he did not get much playing time. When he did get in the game, he was expected to play defense and not worry about scoring. Then, in the middle of the season, the Timberwolves brought in a new coach. Flip Saunders loved Garnett's skills and thought that the young player deserved more playing time. He inserted Garnett into the starting line-up and designed plays around him. In the second half of the season, he averaged nearly 14 points per game (finishing with an average of 10.4 for the entire season) and was named to the league's all-rookie second team. The skilled young player soon gained the nickname "Da Kid."

In 1996, the Timberwolves again had the fifth overall pick in the draft, and they chose Stephon Marbury, one of Garnett's good friends. Both players were thrilled at the opportunity to play together. In the 1996-97 season, with Garnett and the talented Tom Gugliotta playing the forward positions and Marbury handling the point guard duties, Minnesota made the playoffs for the first time, although they lost to the Houston Rockets in the first round. Garnett had a great season, averaging more than 17 points per game and appearing in his first NBA All-Star Game. At age 20, he was the youngest player ever selected to play in the All-Star Game.

Signing the Biggest Contract in Professional Sports

Before the start of the 1997-98 season, Garnett signed a huge contract with the T-Wolves. In order to make sure he did not become a free agent and sign with another team, Minnesota renegotiated his rookie contract. In October 1997, the team signed Garnett to a six-year deal that was worth a staggering $126 million. At that time, it was the richest contract ever in any professional sport.

The reaction to the huge contract was immediate. Timberwolves fans were happy, because it meant Garnett would be staying for a long time. In the rest of the sports world, however, there was a great deal of anger. Many people, including some NBA veterans, felt that no player of his age and experience was worth that much money. They also worried that the sports

world would be in trouble if contracts kept growing at such an amazing rate.

Expectations were high for the Timberwolves for the 1997-98 season, and Garnett and his teammates did not disappoint their fans. They finished with a team-record 45 wins and again made the playoffs. This time, they took the powerful Seattle SuperSonics to the brink of elimination in the first round before losing the deciding game 5, 97-84. Unfortunately, it was one of Garnett's worst games as a professional. He scored just seven points and committed ten turnovers. After the game, he said that he "learned that sometimes you can get too hyped up. You can get too emotional. . . . I just got frustrated and started forcing some things." While the playoff loss was a disappointment, his individual statistics continued to improve. Garnett averaged 18.5 points, 9.6 rebounds, and 4.2 assists per game. He scored more than 10 points in every regular-season game and made the All-Star Game for the second straight season.

Garnett expected the Timberwolves to continue to get better. However, the 1998-99 season would prove to be a very difficult one. First, the start of the season was delayed when the NBA players and team owners could not agree on how the league should be run financially. When the two sides finally worked out their differences, there was only enough time to play a 50-game season (the regular season is usually 82 games long). In addition, the new financial rules made it difficult for some teams to keep all of their top players. The Timberwolves were one of those teams. Tom Gugliotta left the T-Wolves to join the Phoenix Suns, and Minnesota also decided it could not afford to keep Stephon Marbury. They traded Marbury to the New Jersey Nets, getting Terrell Brandon in return as part of a three-team trade.

Garnett was disappointed to see his friend go. But on the court, he showed he was a top professional who could play through personal setbacks. He averaged a career-best 20.8 points and 10.4 rebounds per game, which placed him ninth in the league in rebounding and 11th in scoring. The T-Wolves finished 25-25 and made the playoffs for the third straight season. Once again, Minnesota faced one of the top teams in the league in the first round. They lost in four games to the San Antonio Spurs.

In the 1999-2000 season, it appeared that the young Timberwolves would finally realize their potential. The team finished the season with a franchise-best 50 wins and appeared poised to make its first long playoff run. Garnett certainly did his part to help the T-Wolves win. His numbers improved for the fifth straight season, to 22.9 points and 11.8 rebounds per game. This production placed him in the top ten in the league in both

categories. In addition to making his annual trip to the All-Star Game, he was named to the league's All-Defensive Team for the first time.

But once the playoffs began, the Timberwolves suffered yet another first-round exit. Then, during the off-season, the Minnesota team was rocked by tragedy when popular forward Malik Sealy was killed in an automobile accident. The death of Sealy shocked and saddened his teammates. But Garnett and the rest of the T-Wolves entered the 2000-01 season with more determination than ever. Minnesota posted another strong regular season, finishing 47-35 and once again making the playoffs. Garnett averaged 22 points and 11.4 rebounds per game. However, just as in the previous four years, the team suffered an agonizing first-round playoff loss.

"Garnett was thrilled to be a part of the 2000 U.S. Olympic basketball team, which won the gold medal. Standing on the podium to receive his gold medal and hearing the American national anthem, he said, "was like a piece of birthday cake . . . bigger, maybe wedding cake . . . covered with 100 times more frosting than normal. It's sweet."

Winning a Gold Medal in the 2000 Olympics

In addition to his NBA experience, Garnett had the honor of representing the United States in the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, as part of the gold medal-winning men's basketball team. The teams the United States sends to the Olympics are still recognized as the greatest collection of basketball talent in the world, and Garnett was thrilled to be a part of that. Standing on the podium to receive his gold medal and hearing the American national anthem "was like a piece of birthday cake . . . bigger, maybe wedding cake . . . covered with 100 times more frosting than normal. It's sweet," he recalled.

The win may have been sweet, but it was not without controversy. The U.S. men's team once won its Olympic games by 30 points or more. But in Sydney, the team survived Lithuania's upset bid by just two points and let France close to within four points late in the gold medal game. And when the team did win, the players often complained about the referees or other distractions. In the end, Garnett and his teammates received a great deal of negative press during and after the Games.

Garnett (right) and Vince Carter (left) show off their gold medals during the award ceremony for men's basketball at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, October 1, 2000.

A Promising Future

Only 25 years old in 2001, Garnett has a long, promising future in front of him. Popular with fans around the country, he is one of the most personable and talented players in the NBA. Almost everyone who knows basketball believes that Garnett will have a great career. "He can be as good as he wants to be," said former player and current television commentator Charles Barkley. "He's got tremendous talent and a great body. Those long arms help him a lot. And his head is certainly screwed on straight. I don't think he'll ever turn into a knucklehead." "This kid has style," added former Minnesota assistant coach Doc Rivers. "That's something nobody else can teach him. You're either born with it or you're not. And Kevin Garnett was born with it."

Garnett knows he has been blessed with great talent, and he expects to make the most of it. "Sometimes it feels like I'm coming of age," he says,

"but then there's such a long way for me to go. People can call me whatever. I just hope when I'm done, I'm known as a winner."

MAJOR INFLUENCES

Although Garnett is still a young man, he has experienced his share of grief. Several people who had a major influence on his life and professional development passed away in the 1990s. Among these were his good friend Eldrick Leamon, who died in a motorcycle accident in 1994; basketball legend Wilt Chamberlain, who died of natural causes in 1999; and teammate Malik Sealy, who was killed by a drunk driver in an automobile accident in 2000. Each of these men hold a special place in Garnett's heart.

> *"This kid has style," said former Minnesota assistant coach Doc Rivers. "That's something nobody else can teach him. You're either born with it or you're not. And Kevin Garnett was born with it."*

Leamon, whom Garnett called "Uncle El," played on the same Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) summer league team as Garnett. The two played pick-up games together whenever they could. In fact, they had just finished playing a game before Leamon's accident. To honor Leamon, Garnett always sits in the next-to-last seat on the Timberwolves' bench, keeping the last seat open for his friend. "I leave that last seat open because I'm always thinking about my boy, Uncle El," he explained. "I always envision him sitting right there next to me, like he's in the AAU. . . . I think of how much I have to be thankful for, every time I sit down in that second-to-last seat."

Garnett always respected Wilt Chamberlain and knew all about the NBA legend's career. That respect grew when Garnett portrayed a young Chamberlain in the HBO movie *Rebound*, which told the story of New York playground legend Earl (The Goat) Manigault. Garnett actually met Chamberlain at the 1997 NBA All-Star Weekend in Cleveland. Garnett was there to play in the All-Star Game, while Chamberlain was being honored as one of the NBA's 50 all-time greatest players. "I really took [his death] to heart," said Garnett. "We lost not only a great basketball player but a great person with heart. Wilt Chamberlain was basketball, just like Michael Jordan. People who didn't pay attention to basketball still knew who Wilt Chamberlain was. He set the tone for the superstars after."

It was perhaps the death of Sealy that had the most profound influence on Garnett. A New York playground legend and Garnett's teammate on the Timberwolves, Sealy was killed by a drunk driver on May 20, 2000, while driving home from Garnett's 24th birthday party. The driver of the other car involved in the accident crossed the center line and struck Sealy's car head-on. Garnett had followed Sealy's career from his college days and was close to Sealy from the time they first became teammates. "[It's] messed up that my man's gone, but I know he's gone to a better place and that's what's keeping me so strong," Garnett wrote to fans on his web site after Sealy's death. "I think of the good times both on and off the court. I feel so special because my dream of not only playing in the NBA came true, but to play with a guy who I grew up trying to be like, my life is so complete, I only wish ya'll were me and that ya'll could have been around him like I was blessed to be."

> *Garnett knows he has been blessed with great talent, and he expects to make the most of it. "Sometimes it feels like I'm coming of age, but then there's such a long way for me to go. People can call me whatever. I just hope when I'm done, I'm known as a winner."*

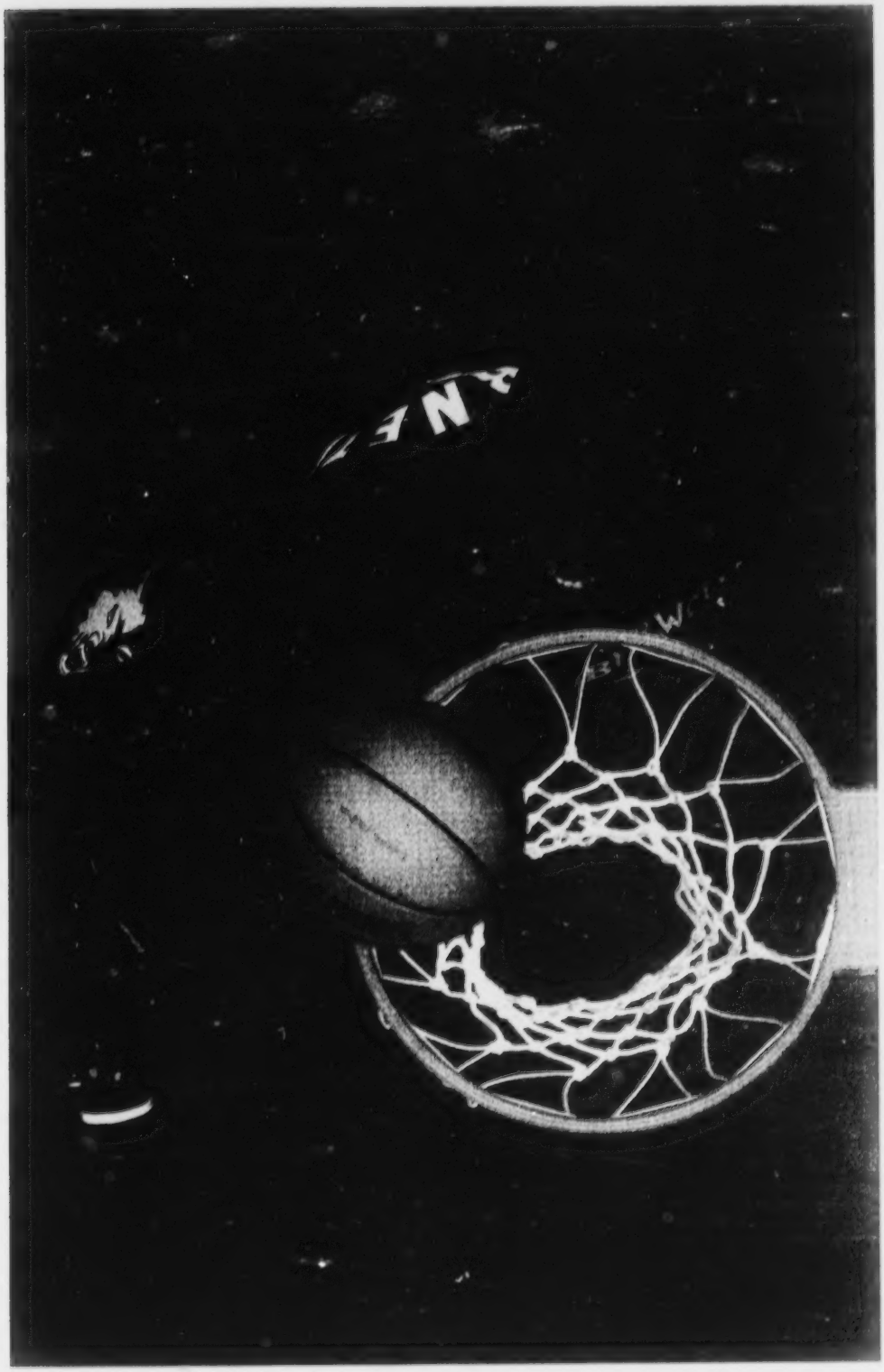
HOME AND FAMILY

Garnett lives in Minneapolis on 14 acres of land that he has used to build a play area for family and friends, complete with go-kart track. He remains unmarried, but he dates regularly. When he first moved to Minneapolis, his sister Ashley lived with him, as did his best friend, Jaime (Bug) Peters. In 2001, he still has a group of friends and family known as the OBF, or Original Block Family, that spends time with him at home and on the road.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Off the court, Garnett enjoys hanging out with friends, playing video games, and listening to music. "I don't drink or smoke or go out much at all," he says. "I have an image to uphold. People are watching. Kids are watching." His interests have started to broaden as he matures. For example, he expressed interest in an acting career after portraying Wilt Chamberlain in the HBO movie *Rebound*.

Garnett has become a fixture in the Minneapolis community. He is very active in charity work, and he makes numerous visits to sick children in



Garnett in 2001.

local hospitals. He has started his own foundation to help disadvantaged children with their medical expenses. When he is back in Mauldin, where he also owns a home, he often hangs out at the local recreation center. He plays in pickup games with the local kids and often takes a dozen or more out to eat after the games, so he can answer their questions and serve as a role model. He paid to have a local basketball court repaved in his hometown, and he also hosted a community cookout for the court's re-opening ceremony. "He comes back here and really pulls together the community," says Charles Bankhead, the Mauldin mayor. "He's a great young man."

Like many young basketball superstars, Garnett has taken advantage of his on-court fame to sign lucrative endorsement deals off the court. Early in his career, he represented Nike and did several humorous television commercials for that company's shoes. These fun commercials were well-received by fans and non-fans alike. In 2000, he ended his relationship with Nike and chose to represent the up-and-coming shoe and apparel company AND 1. Garnett did his first television commercials for AND 1 in February 2001.

Garnett is known for wearing another piece of on-court apparel that is more superstition than anything else. Ever since he can remember, Garnett has worn a rubber band on either his wrist or his ankle whenever he plays a game. He cannot remember how the habit got started, but it reached new heights during the 2000 Olympics. During the Games, he had the makers of Wordstretch rubber bands, his favorite brand, make special rubber bands for himself and all of his teammates. On one side of the golden bands were the words "Dream Team 2000," and on the other side were "Nothin' less than gold." During the NBA season, Wordstretch manufactures special "KG 21" rubber bands for Garnett. More than 10 other NBA stars also sport the rubber bands, as do such celebrities as Janet Jackson.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Mr. Basketball (South Carolina): 1994
McDonald's All-American: 1995
McDonald's All-American Game Most Outstanding Player: 1995
Mr. Basketball (Illinois): 1995
All-America First Team *(Parade Magazine)*: 1995
National High School Player of the Year (*USA Today*): 1995
NBA All-Rookie Second Team: 1996
NBA All-Star Team: 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001
NBA All-Defensive Team: 2000
Olympic Basketball: 2000, gold medal

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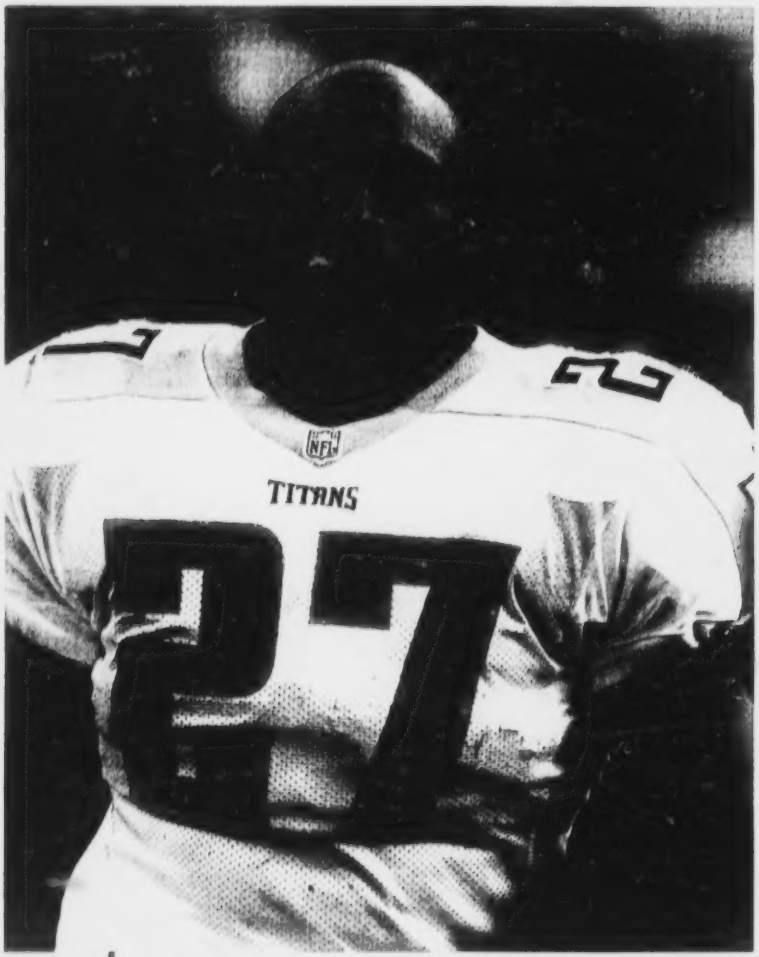
USA Today, Nov. 9, 1999, p.C1

ADDRESS

Minnesota Timberwolves
600 First Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55403-9801

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.nba.com
http://www.pioneerplanet.com/archive/garnett



Eddie George 1973-

American Professional Football Player with the Tennessee Titans
1995 Heisman Trophy Winner
1996 NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year

BIRTH

Edward Nathan George was born on September 24, 1973, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His father was also named Eddie George, and his mother was Donna George. Eddie Senior left the family in 1980. Soon thereafter, young Eddie's parents divorced. Donna George raised Eddie and his older sister, Les-

lie, by herself. To make ends meet Donna took jobs as a waitress, an automotive factory worker, a professional model, and a flight attendant.

YOUTH

George grew up in a rough neighborhood that was known as a home for drugs and crime. Because his neighborhood was so tough, it was easy for him to fall in with the wrong crowd. As he grew older, George often misbehaved, both at home and at school. "He wasn't living up to his expectations," his mother recalled. "He was telling me a whole bunch of lies." The lack of a father figure was one of the reasons for George's troubles. His father was a poor influence who drank, gambled, used drugs, and was rarely around. One of the few positive things Eddie Senior ever did for his son was introduce him to the game of football.

As George was growing up, he often misbehaved, both at home and at school. He also fell in with the wrong crowd. "He wasn't living up to his expectations," his mother recalled. "He was telling me a whole bunch of lies."

EDUCATION

As a boy, George grew to love football and dreamed of playing professionally. Unfortunately, he lacked discipline and refused to do what it took to succeed as a player. When he took the same casual approach toward school, his grades began to slip. George's mother worried that his grades were so poor that he would not be accepted to college.

After his sophomore year at Philadelphia's Abington High School, George approached his mother and asked for $55 for a summer school class to improve his math skills. A few days later, Donna found out from one of his teachers that he had to attend summer school because he had already failed the class, and he needed a passing grade to stay on the football team. Donna George's discovery that her son had lied to her once again changed Eddie's life forever. She was so angry with her son that she packed his bags and told him she was enrolling him at Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia.

Donna hoped that this all-boys prep school would be the answer to her son's problems with authority and discipline. Her brother Derek had attended the same school when he was younger, and he felt that it was just what his nephew needed to get his life back on track. But when George

found out what was happening, he was devastated. He tried to convince his mother to change her mind, but she was determined that he would attend Fork Union.

Moving to Military School

In August 1989, Donna and Eddie George drove five hours from Philadelphia to the small town in central Virginia where Fork Union was located. All George could think about was his football career. He worried that no one would notice him if he played at a military academy. But this was the least of Donna's worries. She just wanted what was best for her son. In time, George would grow to understand his mother's decision. "I thought my football career was over," he remembered. "I felt my mom was stripping me of my dreams, when she was just making my dreams become a reality."

When Donna George forced her son to transfer to Fork Union, he worried that no one would notice him if he played at a military academy. In time, George would grow to understand his mother's decision. "I thought my football career was over," he remembered. "I felt my mom was stripping me of my dreams, when she was just making my dreams become a reality."

At Fork Union, George lived the tough life of a military cadet. He woke up early every day and conformed to a strict daily schedule of attending classes, studying, and performing military routines. All the cadets then retired for the night at 10:15 p.m. sharp. There was some free time during the week and on weekends, but not much. At first, George rebelled against the rules and acted as if he was still at Abington High School. His behavior did not go over too well with his superiors, and he was often punished. But after a couple of months, George started to learn the concepts of discipline, responsibility, and leadership.

Despite Fork Union's rigid educational and military routine, George and the other cadets were encouraged to participate in athletics. Newly dedicated, George started weight training and other exercise programs. To his surprise, his football career did not suffer at the academy. Instead, it flourished. He played on the Fork Union football team for three seasons. During his third season, George played running back and rushed for an

amazing 2,572 yards. He also took part in track and field and won the state hurdles title. George graduated from Fork Union in 1992.

Attending Ohio State University

George's athletic performance attracted the interest of college scouts, and several schools offered him scholarships. He accepted a scholarship from Ohio State University. George was very excited to receive a full football scholarship from Ohio State, which had gained a reputation as a college football powerhouse and one of the top teams in the Big Ten Conference. Donna George was excited that her son had finally developed the discipline that was necessary for him to follow his dreams. He spent four years there, attending classes and playing on the football team.

George left Ohio State in 1996 without completing his degree. But in June 2001, he fulfilled a promise to himself and graduated from Ohio State with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture. Despite his fame and wealth, George thought that it was important to complete his final 20 credit hours and earn his bachelor's degree. "It was like sitting at the two-yard line for six years," he noted. "I chipped away at it and came back here last year to finally get it done."

George left Ohio State in 1996 without completing his degree. But in June 2001, he fulfilled a promise to himself and graduated from Ohio State with a bachelor's degree. "It was like sitting at the two-yard line for six years. I chipped away at it and came back here last year to finally get it done."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

College—The Ohio State University Buckeyes

George began his football career at Ohio State, although he did not play much during his first two seasons there. Instead, he was a backup for the team's two established stars at running back, Robert Smith and Raymont Harris, both of whom went on to achieve success as professional football players. At one time, George would have felt frustrated by the situation. But instead, he saw it as an opportunity to study and learn from two players that he admired.

During his freshman season, George saw playing time during a game against the University of Illinois at Buckeye Stadium. The results were dis-

George (27) of Ohio State running for a touchdown against Notre Dame, December 4, 1995.

astrous. He fumbled twice near the goal line, costing his team the game. Afterwards, fans and fellow students would not let him forget about his mistakes in that one game. But George took the criticism in stride and made a promise to himself to learn from his mistakes. "It took me about two hours to forget that," he recalled. "It took everyone else two years."

By his junior season in 1994, George was finally ready to take over as the team's starting running back. He had a spectacular season, rushing for 1,442 yards and 12 touchdowns. His performance earned him an honorable mention on the All-Big Ten team. Adding to his accomplishments on the field, George impressed his teammates and coaches with his work ethic. As Ohio State Head Coach John Cooper noted, "Eddie George is one of the hardest working players I've ever been associated with." The Buckeyes finished the 1994 season with a 9-2 record and a loss to Alabama in the Citrus Bowl. George had a good game in the season finale,

but he still felt bitter about the loss. He dedicated the next summer to becoming an even better player.

George's hard work proved to be worthwhile. During his senior season in 1995, he set a new school record by rushing for 1,846 yards. This total included 11 straight 100-yard games to end the season. He also scored more touchdowns than any other college player in the nation with 24. In addition, he earned a reputation as a dependable receiver, gaining 399 yards on 44 catches. He even got a chance to avenge his freshman mistakes against Illinois. During that game, George rushed for an Ohio State record 314 yards on 36 carries. He also scored two touchdowns, leading the Buckeyes to a 41-3 victory. Illinois Coach Lou Tepper was relieved when the game ended. "Eddie George was a nightmare," he said.

Despite all of George's individual achievements, the Buckeyes' 1995 season ended in disappointment. First, they lost 31-23 to the University of Michigan in the regular-season finale. It was the Buckeyes' first loss of the season, and it cost them a trip to the Rose Bowl and a chance at the NCAA championship. Instead, Ohio State went to the Citrus Bowl for the second straight year, where they were beaten 20-14 by the University of Tennessee.

"As Ohio State Head Coach John Cooper noted, "Eddie George is one of the hardest working players I've ever been associated with."

Winning the Heisman Trophy

George's record-breaking senior season earned him many awards. For example, he was a unanimous selection to the All America team. He won the Doak Walker Award as the best running back in the nation and the Walter Camp Trophy as the national player of the year. In addition, he received the Maxwell Award for being the most outstanding player in college football. But the biggest honor came when George won the prestigious Heisman Trophy, given to the best college football player in the country. He beat out Tommie Frazier from the University of Nebraska and Danny Wuerffel from the University of Florida for the award. George became the fifth Buckeye to win the Heisman, following in the footsteps of such greats as Les Horvath, Vic Janowicz, Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, and Archie Griffin, who won the award twice.

While George's hard work and dedication earned him a reputation as a spectacular and durable player, the same could not be said for his actual

Heisman Trophy. On his way back to Ohio, George put the trophy through an x-ray machine at New York's La Guardia Airport. The trophy got stuck in the machine, and one of its fingers was broken. Airport officials apologized to George and promised to pay to get the trophy fixed. At first he was disappointed about the situation, but then he realized that it was the award—not the actual trophy—that was most important. "It doesn't matter as long as I've got it," he said.

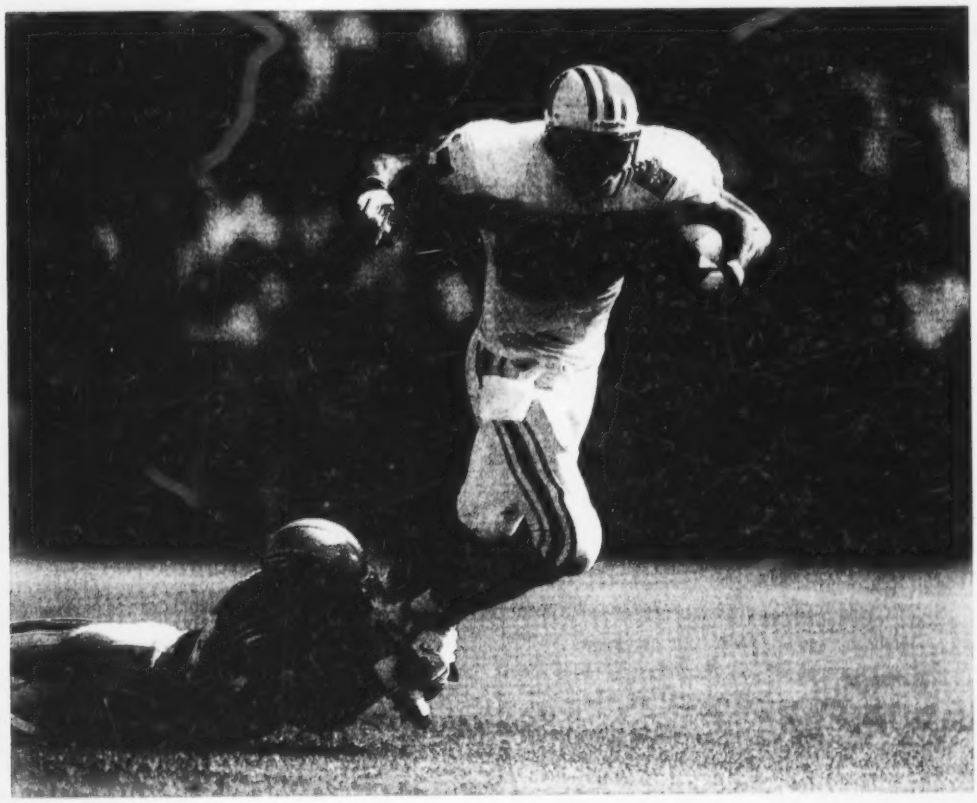
Many experts predicted that George, as the Heisman Trophy winner, would be a top ten pick in the 1996 NFL draft. But questions arose about his speed, and he slipped all the way to number 14. He was finally drafted by the Houston Oilers. In fact, George was not even the first running back selected in the draft. Nebraska's talented but troubled Lawrence Phillips was taken at number six by the St. Louis Rams, and Tshimanga Biakabutuka of Michigan was chosen at number eight by the Carolina Panthers. Both went on to have NFL careers that paled in comparison to George's. Phillips's career ended after a few seasons of disappointing play and legal problems. Biakabutuka proved to be injury-prone and never lived up to expectations. Meanwhile, Eddie George flourished in the NFL.

A Fateful Day

One of the most fateful days in George's life came on July 19, 1996, when he signed his first professional football contract. The Oilers had dedicated themselves to signing their top draft pick by the first day of training camp. George was also anxious to get to work, and he and the team agreed on a five-year contract worth $6.09 million, including a signing bonus worth about $1.2 million. Despite the big payday, there was another reason why this day was so significant for George.

Because of all his mother had done for him, George wanted her to be present at the signing and the news conference that followed. Donna wanted to be there as well, but she had a conflict with her job as a flight attendant. She was scheduled to work on a flight from New York to Paris on July 17, and she would not be back in time to attend the signing. Donna did not feel that it was right to try to get out of work, even for such a big event in her son's life.

Still, George felt very strongly that his mother should be there. He finally got his agent, Lamont Smith, to convince her to come. Smith told Donna that her son's first contract was a once-in-a-lifetime event, and that she would probably regret it if she missed the signing. He also wanted her present so that he could explain some of the financial language about



George (27) rushing for the Tennessee Oilers against the New England Patriots, September 20, 1998.

George's contract to her in person. Finally, Donna agreed to change her work schedule.

On July 17, the flight on which Donna George was supposed to be working exploded in the sky and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. All 230 people on board were killed, including a lot of her personal friends. After the crash, Donna was in shock. "It will take a long time to heal," she said. George was also overcome with emotions about the incident. "It's hard," he noted. "My prayers go out to all of the families, but you're also glad not to be grieving."

Despite this tragedy, Donna went back to work as a flight attendant. She just could not imagine retiring and refused to take the easy road, despite the newfound wealth of her son. "I just don't see me depending on my son's income," she explained. "I don't see him being the head of my household." She did make one compromise, though. She promised George and his sister, Leslie, that she would only work on domestic flights instead of international ones in the future.

NFL—The Houston Oilers

After his contract situation was resolved, George began training with the Oilers. He entered training camp in competition with Rodney Thomas for the starting running back spot with the team. George had an excellent camp and won the job. But just as the season was about to start, Oilers owner Bud Adams announced that 1996 would be the team's last year in Houston. He planned to relocate the Oilers in 1997 to Nashville, Tennessee. Oilers' fans were angry about the situation and many expressed their displeasure by boycotting games. The team failed to make the playoffs. But George still had an excellent rookie season. He racked up 1,368 yards and 8 touchdowns for the Oilers.

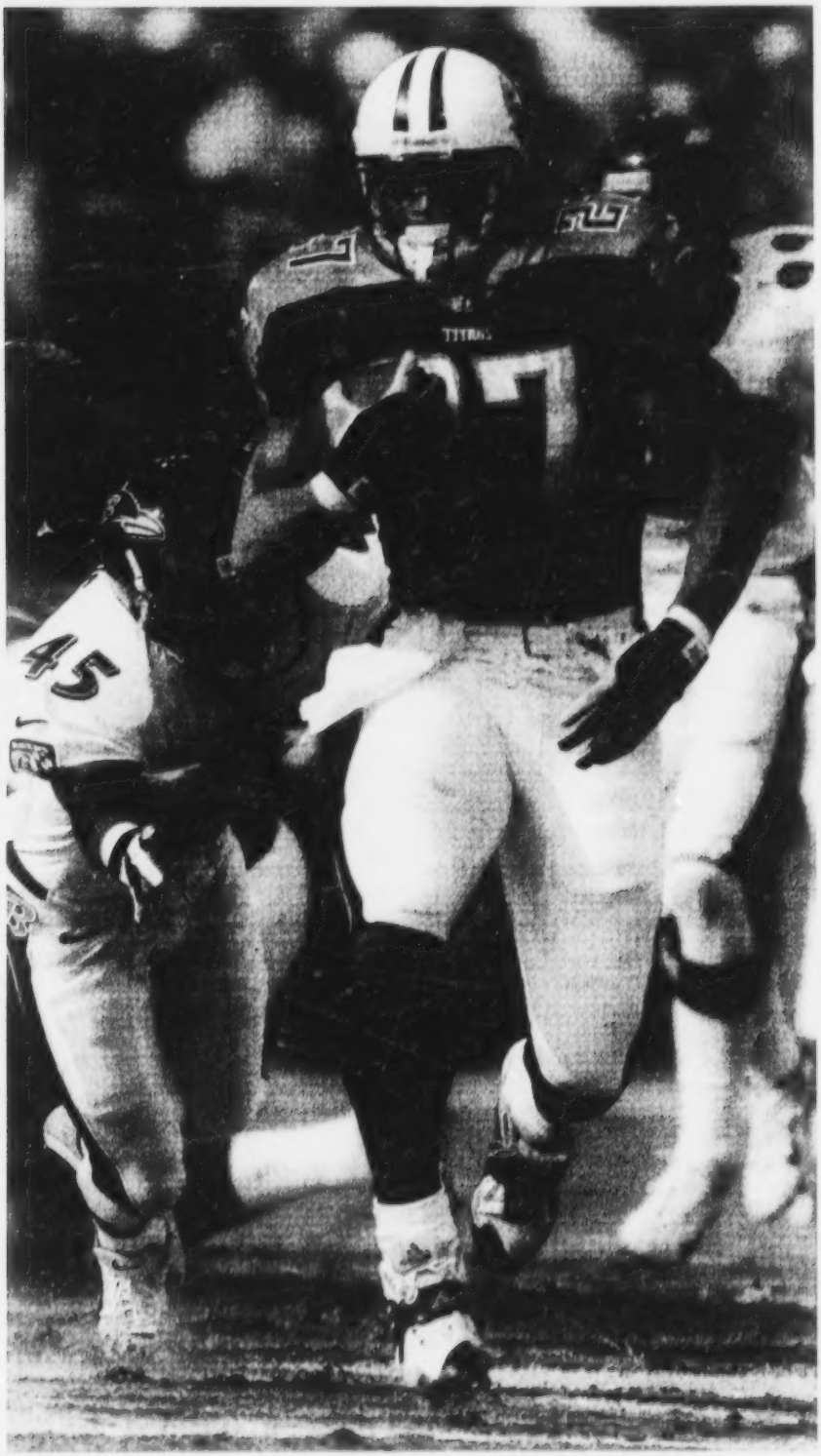
George's effort in his first season earned him the honor of being named the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year. In winning the award, he beat out wide receiver Terry Glenn, who had been one of his teammates at Ohio State. George was also named as an alternate in the Pro Bowl for the American Football Conference (AFC).

In 1997, George and the Oilers began playing in Tennessee. The team's new stadium in Nashville was not yet complete, so the Oilers took the field at the Liberty Bowl in Memphis. Once again, the team missed the playoffs. In addition, crowds for Oilers games were small and George's excellent second season (1,399 yards and 6 touchdowns) went all but unnoticed by the local fans. He did get some national recognition, though, as he was named to the AFC Pro Bowl squad.

In 1998, the Oilers moved to Nashville to play in Vanderbilt Stadium and started strong. George injured his ankle during the season, but he still managed to appear in all of the team's games. He ended the season with 1,294 yards and 5 touchdowns, which earned him another Pro Bowl appearance. The Oilers, however, failed to make the playoffs again. George admitted that the team's constant relocating sometimes made things difficult for him and his teammates. "It was hard to concentrate on football with all that other stuff," he noted.

The Tennessee Titans

The 1998 season was the beginning of a new era for George and his teammates. The Oilers finally moved to their permanent home at Adelphi Coliseum and changed their name to the Titans. They also adopted a new look with flashy uniforms. As these changes took place, the fans in Nashville finally started to take notice of their team.



George picks up yardage in this playoff game between the Tennessee Titans and the Baltimore Ravens, January 7, 2001.

The Titans responded with an amazing season. George finished the year with 1,304 yards and 9 touchdowns to join Eric Dickerson, Barry Sanders, and former Oiler Earl Campbell as the only four running backs to gain at least 1,200 yards in each of their first four seasons. George was named to the Pro Bowl for the fourth straight year as well.

More importantly, the team made the playoffs for the first time in George's career. They beat the Buffalo Bills in the first round Wild Card game, which was one of the most exciting and controversial games in the history of the league. The Titans seemed certain to lose until they executed a trick play at the end of the game, which allowed them to return a kickoff for the winning touchdown.

The Titans' next victims were the Indianapolis Colts in the AFC Divisional Game. George rushed for a franchise playoff record 162 yards and had a 68-yard touchdown run against the Colts. The next stop for Tennessee was the AFC Championship Game in Jacksonville versus the Jaguars. The Titans had already beaten the Jaguars twice during the regular season, and Jacksonville was hungry for revenge. But the Titans won again to earn a trip to Super Bowl XXXIV.

The Titans' appearance in the Super Bowl, where they faced the St. Louis Rams, turned out to be one of the most entertaining games of all time. When it was all over, the high-powered Rams won the game 23-16, ending the Titans' magical season. But George had a great game. He scored two touchdowns and rushed for 95 yards. He also had an additional 35 yards in receptions. Of course, George would have traded all of his personal accomplishments for a victory in the biggest game of the year.

George's Best Year Yet

During his first four seasons, George quietly gained a reputation as one of the most physical and punishing runners in the game. He had an upright running style that seemed to leave him vulnerable to defensive tacklers, but instead he just ran right over his opponents. He also avoided injury and managed to start every game in his pro career. The Titans rewarded George for his contributions by offering him a six-year contract extension worth $41.25 million. The deal, which also included a signing bonus of $10 million and a guaranteed option of $4 million to be paid in 2001, made him the highest-paid running back in the NFL.

As the 2000 season began, George and the rest of the Titans wanted to come back strong from their disappointing loss in the Super Bowl. George started every game and set a franchise record with 403 carries — just seven

carries short of the league record. He also rushed for 1,509 yards—the most yards in his career—and scored 14 rushing touchdowns. With this impressive performance, he joined Eric Dickerson as the only two running backs in history to gain over 1,200 yards in each of their first five seasons.

A gracious George was more than pleased with these results. He decided that some of his teammates who played a big role in his accomplishments deserved a reward. At a party in a Nashville restaurant, George presented all-terrain vehicles and framed jerseys to each of the five starting offensive linemen on the Titans—Bruce Matthews, Fred Miller, Brad Hopkins, Benji Olson, and Kevin Long—as well as backups Zach Piller and Jason Mathews and tight ends Frank Wycheck and Erron Kinney. George also gave his running backs coach, Sherman Smith, a trip for two to a resort. "My career is based on how those guys do," George explained. "It's nice to be able to show your appreciation for someone."

In 2000, George was so pleased with the season that he decided to give a reward to some of his teammates who played a big role in his accomplishments. So he gave all-terrain vehicles to some of his fellow players, and a trip to a resort for one of the coaches. "My career is based on how those guys do," George explained. "It's nice to be able to show your appreciation for someone."

Despite George's amazing season, the Titans failed to earn a return trip to the Super Bowl. They did win the AFC Central Division title and secured home field advantage for the playoffs, but they lost to the eventual Super Bowl champion Baltimore Ravens in the Divisional Playoffs. George carried the ball 27 times for 91 yards and caught 8 passes for an additional 52 yards in this contest, but his efforts went for naught.

In early 2001, George decided to have surgery to reattach a tendon in his right big toe. The situation was not serious, but the surgery did force the star running back to miss the Titans' off-season mini-camps. "It's not career threatening and actually may be career lengthening," Titans' coach Jeff Fisher said. After the surgery, George first wore a cast and then a walking boot to help with the healing process. Afterward, he was a frequent visitor at the Titans' training facilities, where he could often be found doing everything possible to get ready for the 2001 season.

George carrying his son, Jaire, at the Ohio State University graduation ceremony, June 8, 2001.

"After his son Jaire was born, George vowed to be the father that he never had. His mother, Donna, applauded his efforts. "He loves his son," she said. "That's special to me, because I know Eddie didn't have that role model while he was growing up."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Eddie George is not married, but he does have a son. Born in 1997, George's son, Jaire, is the pride of his life. After Jaire was born, George vowed to be the father that he never had. His mother, Donna, applauded his efforts. "He loves his son," she said. "That's special to me, because I know Eddie didn't have that role model while he was growing up."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When he is not playing football, George enjoys acting. He has filmed several commercials and has appeared on the television series "In the House" and "Nash Bridges." George is also active in the community. In 2000 he established Visions, a Nashville charity aimed at giving kids a chance to succeed in life.

HONORS AND AWARDS

College All America Team: 1995
Heisman Trophy: 1995

Dak Walker Award: 1995
Silver Football Trophy: 1995
Maxwell Award: 1995
NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year: 1996
NFL Pro Bowl Alternate: 1996
NFL Pro Bowl Selection: 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000

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ADDRESS

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Baptist Sports Park
460 Great Circle Road
Nashville, TN 37228

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://eddiegeorge.com
http://titansonline.com
http://www.nfl.com
http://www.nflplayer.com

Alex Rodriguez 1975-

American Professional Baseball Player with the Texas Rangers
Became the Highest-Paid Athlete in Any Sport in 2000

BIRTH

Alexander Emmanuel Rodriguez was born on July 27, 1975, in New York City. His parents, Victor and Lourdes Navarro Rodriguez, were immigrants from the Dominican Republic who owned and operated a shoe store. Alex had an older sister, Susy, and an older brother, Joe.

YOUTH

As a boy in New York City, Rodriguez spent a lot of time with his father at the family shoe store. Most days, he could be found with a large, red plastic bat in his hands. The youngster often amused customers by running around the store, swatting whatever he could reach with the bat.

When Rodriguez was four years old, his parents decided to return to the Dominican Republic. Their goal in coming to America was to make enough money to return to their homeland and purchase a good home in a safe neighborhood. They sold the shoe store in New York and moved the family to the city of Santo Domingo, where the children were enrolled in public schools.

By the time he was five years old, Rodriguez was already hooked on baseball. He often played in neighborhood pick-up games, as the boys from his block would challenge the boys from nearby streets. Because he was not strong enough to make the long throw from shortstop to first base, Rodriguez played second base in those games. "Those games were some of the most intense I've been in," he recalled in his autobiography, *Hit a Grand Slam*. "If I lost, I would go home crying angry tears. The whole night I would think of ways we could win the next day."

When Rodriguez was young, he often played in neighborhood pick-up games. He wasn't strong enough to make the long throw from shortstop to first base, so he played second base. "Those games were some of the most intense I've been in. If I lost, I would go home crying angry tears. The whole night I would think of ways we could win the next day."

When Rodriguez was eight, his parents experienced hard times. Economic troubles in Santo Domingo forced the family to sell their home and move back to the United States, where they settled just outside Miami, Florida. Shortly after returning to America, his parents divorced. It was a difficult time for the young boy. "I kept thinking that my father would come back, but he never did," he remembered. "All the love I had for him I just gave to my mother. She deserved it. I did my best to help out around the house and bring home good grades to make my mom proud."

When his parents divorced, Rodriguez turned to baseball as the one thing he could do to make himself feel good. His big break came after he had spent a month watching a local team practice behind his elementary

school, waiting for his chance to play. When the team's catcher did not show up one day, the coach, Juan Diego Arteaga, asked Rodriguez if he would like to play. Even though he had to play catcher—a position he had never played before—Rodriguez did so well that he joined the team full-time.

In addition, Arteaga became like a second father to Rodriguez. Since Rodriguez never saw his father in person again after the divorce, the coach became the strong masculine presence that he needed in his life. "I have so many things thanks to him," Rodriguez said of Arteaga, who passed away in 1990. "He guided me . . . and always made sure I was taken care of." Arteaga's son, J. D., also played on the team and the two boys quickly became best friends. The Arteagas lived only two blocks from the Rodriguez home in the Kendall suburb of Miami, so Alex spent a great deal of time at their home.

Rodriguez could usually be found at the Hank Kline Boys and Girls Club. "It was the only place I could afford to go. Membership was ten cents a year. They taught you to believe in yourself." For Rodriguez, the club was "the neatest place in the world."

Hanging Out at the Boys and Girls Club

When he was not in school or hanging out with J. D., Rodriguez could usually be found at the Hank Kline Boys and Girls Club. "It was the only place I could afford to go," Rodriguez remembered. "Membership was ten cents a year. They taught you to believe in yourself." In a city filled with dangers, the Boys and Girls Club was a safe place where kids could hang out and not worry about getting into trouble. For Rodriguez, the club was "the neatest place in the world."

Rodriguez first began to take sports seriously when he became friends with the club's baseball director, Eddy "Gallo" Rodriguez (no relation to Alex). Thanks to his good coaching, the club had a reputation as being one of the best places to play baseball in the city of Miami. In fact, he had coached several players who went on to play professional baseball, including Jose Canseco, Rafael Palmeiro, and Danny Tartabull. The coach felt that young Alex had the potential to join these players in the majors someday. "You can see players right away," Eddy Rodriguez said when asked about Alex. "They just have better physical ability. But nobody who has ever come through our doors has ever worked harder than Alex."

Once he started to take baseball seriously, Rodriguez idolized two players—shortstop Cal Ripken Jr. of the Baltimore Orioles, and outfielder Dale Murphy of the Atlanta Braves. He had posters of both in his bedroom, and he chose the number three for his uniform because it was the number that Murphy wore. It was no coincidence that, in addition to being All-Star players on the field, both Ripken and Murphy were known to be two of the nicest and most respected people off the field. Rodriguez's mother did not mind if her son played sports, but she made sure he understood that his actions off the field were more important. "I don't care if you turn out to be a terrible player," she told him. "I just want you to be a good person."

Rodriguez was definitely not a terrible player, however. During his first season playing at the Boys and Girls Club, he won the league batting title. In the years he played for the club team, he led the squad to three Miami city titles and two national titles. With donations paying the way, the team would take month-long road trips to face the best competition in the nation. These trips helped make Rodriguez a better baseball player, for they allowed him to test his skills against many of the country's top teen players.

> *Eddy "Gallo" Rodriguez (no relation to Alex), his coach at the Boys and Girls Club, felt that young Alex had the potential to play in the major leagues someday. "You can see players right away," Eddy Rodriguez said. "They just have better physical ability. But nobody who has ever come through our doors has ever worked harder than Alex."*

EDUCATION

As Rodriguez grew older, his mother worked two jobs to make sure he and his siblings could attend private school. Since his family moved around a lot, he attended four different schools before he reached high school. He played baseball at each school and always excelled in the sport.

By the time he entered the private Westminster Christian High School in Miami, Rodriguez had blossomed into an exceptional all-around athlete. He played football, basketball, and baseball, and he was a star in all three. In football, he played quarterback and led his team to a 9-1 record his junior season. He was named All-State twice and was scouted by the University of Miami, one of the best college football programs in the country. Rodriguez briefly considered playing two sports when he reached college,

Rodriguez listens as the Seattle Mariners ask him to join their team amid cheers from his mother, far left, and his friends, June 3, 1993.

but he realized that his future was in baseball, and that it would be better if he did not risk getting injured on the football field. He gave up football after his senior year at Westminster.

As good as Rodriguez was in football, he was even better at baseball. He was a true superstar, putting up numbers that were among the best for any high school baseball player in the entire country. Playing his usual position of shortstop, Rodriguez batted .419 in his three seasons on the varsity team. He led the team to an amazing record of 86 victories and only 13 losses during that time.

As a junior in 1992, Rodriguez hit .477 with 6 home runs and 42 stolen bases and led his team to the Florida high school state championship. The team was also voted by coaches as the best high school team in the entire United States. During his stellar senior season, Rodriguez hit .505 with 9 home runs and 35 stolen bases. As a result of his remarkable efforts, Rodri-

guez was named USA Baseball's Junior Player of the Year and the Gatorade National Student-Athlete of the Year. In addition, he became the only high school player ever asked to attend the tryouts for Team USA—the team that represents the United States in the Olympic Games and other international competitions. He did not make that team, but he did play for the U.S. Junior National Team.

Skipping College to Join the Major Leagues

Rodriguez fully intended to go to college after he graduated from high school in 1993, and he planned to stay close to home and attend the University of Miami. The Hurricanes were one of the best teams in college baseball, regularly playing in the College World Series. Attending Miami would allow Rodriguez to learn from some of the best coaches in the game and to gain national exposure on ESPN and other television networks. As it turned out, however, Rodriguez never played baseball for the Hurricanes.

Rodriguez knew that professional baseball teams were interested in drafting him because numerous pro scouts attended his high school games. In fact, 68 scouts were in attendance at the team's season opener alone. "My mom told me that all the scouts are here because they see something they like," Rodriguez said at the time. "She said, 'Don't change, just be yourself.'" Still, Rodriguez was surprised when he was the very first player selected in the 1993 major league baseball draft by the Seattle Mariners.

As the first pick overall, Rodriguez knew that he could sign a very large contract with the Mariners. This knowledge led him to change his mind about attending Miami. He wanted to go to college, but he was even more determined to provide financial security for his mother and the rest of his family. Just one day before he was supposed to start classes at the University of Miami, he signed a three-year, $1.3 million contract with the Mariners. He thus launched his professional baseball career when he was just 17 years old. The media called the new baseball sensation "A- Rod" for short.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Major League Baseball—The Seattle Mariners

Rodriguez was not thrilled about being drafted by the Mariners. The team had lost more games than it had won almost every season since it came into existence in 1976, and he was used to winning. But Rodriguez never let his doubts about the club spill over onto the field. After the draft, he

was assigned to play for the Mariners' Class A team in the minor leagues. In baseball, some players start their professional careers in the major leagues. But many more start out playing for a team in the minor leagues, also called the farm system. The teams in the minor leagues are affiliated with those in the major leagues. There are a variety of minor leagues, which are ranked according to the level of competition. The top or best league is Class AAA (called Triple A); next is Class AA, then Class A, then below that are the rookie leagues. Players hope to move up through the system to a Class AAA team and then to the major leagues.

Rodriguez started out playing for the Mariners' Class A team in Appleton, Wisconsin. As the number one overall pick in the draft, he received a warm reception from the Appleton fans, and he enjoyed his time there. He quickly showed he deserved his high draft status, hitting .319 in 65 games to earn a promotion to the Mariners' Class AA team in Jacksonville, Florida.

It was obvious to everyone that Rodriguez was too good to stay in the minor leagues for long. At the end of the 1993 season, the Mariners called him up to play in the big leagues, fulfilling his childhood dream. At age 18, he was one of the youngest players ever to play shortstop in the major leagues. Many people were afraid that Rodriguez would be overwhelmed by the pressure of playing in the big leagues at such a young age. However, one player made sure that would not happen. Mariners' center fielder Ken Griffey Jr., who was widely recognized as one of the best players in baseball, took the young shortstop under his wing. Griffey had made it to the pros when he was just 19 years old, and he made sure that Rodriguez's locker was right next to his own. The two soon became good friends.

For the next two years, Rodriguez bounced back and forth between the Mariners and their top minor league farm team. He struggled in his first extended stay with the team in 1994, and as a result was sent back to the Class AAA team in Calgary, where he finished the season. To further develop his skills, the Mariners asked him to play in a winter league in his native Dominican Republic. He looked forward to the opportunity, but it turned out to be an extremely difficult experience. "I got my tail kicked, learned how hard this game can be," he admitted.

In 1995, Rodriguez moved between the Mariners' Triple A team and Seattle three times. Each time caused more frustration, and he even considered quitting the game. In the end, however, he spent a large part of the season in Seattle and was around to see the team make the playoffs for the first time. The Mariners beat the New York Yankees in a thrilling five-game, first-round series before losing to the Cleveland Indians in the sec-

ond round. Rodriguez hit only .232 for the season, but he showed enough flashes of brilliance to convince the Mariners he was ready to be the team's everyday shortstop at the start of the next season.

The Best Season Ever for a Shortstop

In 1996, Rodriguez exploded onto the baseball scene, compiling one of the best seasons for a shortstop in baseball history. He became the third-youngest player ever to win the American League batting title when he hit .358. In addition, he led the league in hits with 215, in doubles with 54, and in runs scored with 141. He also hit 36 home runs, drove in 123 runs, and totaled 91 extra-base hits. He had the most runs, hits, doubles, and extra base hits ever for a shortstop, and his 379 total bases tied the all-time record for shortstops held by Ernie Banks.

In 1996, Rodriguez exploded onto the baseball scene, compiling one of the best seasons for a shortstop in baseball history and winning multiple awards. "The numbers I put up that year were beyond my wildest goals," Rodriguez recalled. "I marvel at it."

Rodriguez was rewarded for his efforts by becoming the youngest shortstop ever voted to the All-Star team. In addition, *Sporting News* named him the Major League Player of the Year, and he missed winning the prestigious Most Valuable Player award by two votes. "The numbers I put up that year were beyond my wildest goals," Rodriguez recalled. "I marvel at it."

In 1997, Rodriguez got off to a great start. But his season was threatened by an injury when he suffered a deep chest bruise after colliding with Yankees' pitcher Roger Clemens at home plate. Despite spending some time on the disabled list, he still put together an excellent season. He again hit over .300, and he scored 100 runs and led the Mariners with 29 stolen bases. "I'm proud of the way I was able to come back and stay in the lineup," he stated. "I think I was about 60 percent when I came back. I was prouder of '97 than '96 because of playing through the pain."

Over the next three seasons, Rodriguez earned a place among the best players in the league. In 1998, he became just the third player in major league history to hit more than 40 home runs while stealing more than 40 bases. "I was thrilled," he said of the remarkable accomplishment. "Unbelievable, great, huge, wow—words don't do justice to how it felt."

Rodriguez connecting with the ball, September 9, 1998.

Rodriguez was listed among the league leaders in almost every offensive category that season, with 42 home runs, 46 steals, 213 hits, 123 runs, and 124 runs batted in. In 1999, Rodriguez suffered a cartilage injury and missed 32 games, but he still had a terrific season. While his batting average dipped to .285, he still slammed 42 home runs and knocked in 111 runs while scoring 110 runs.

In 2000, Rodriguez posted numbers that almost equaled his 1996 campaign, and this time he took his team to the playoffs. Ken Griffey Jr. had left Seattle in the off-season, which meant that the Mariners were considered to be Rodriguez's team for the first time. He responded by hitting .316 and finishing in the top 10 in almost every other offensive category, including runs (134), home runs (41), runs batted in (132), slugging aver-

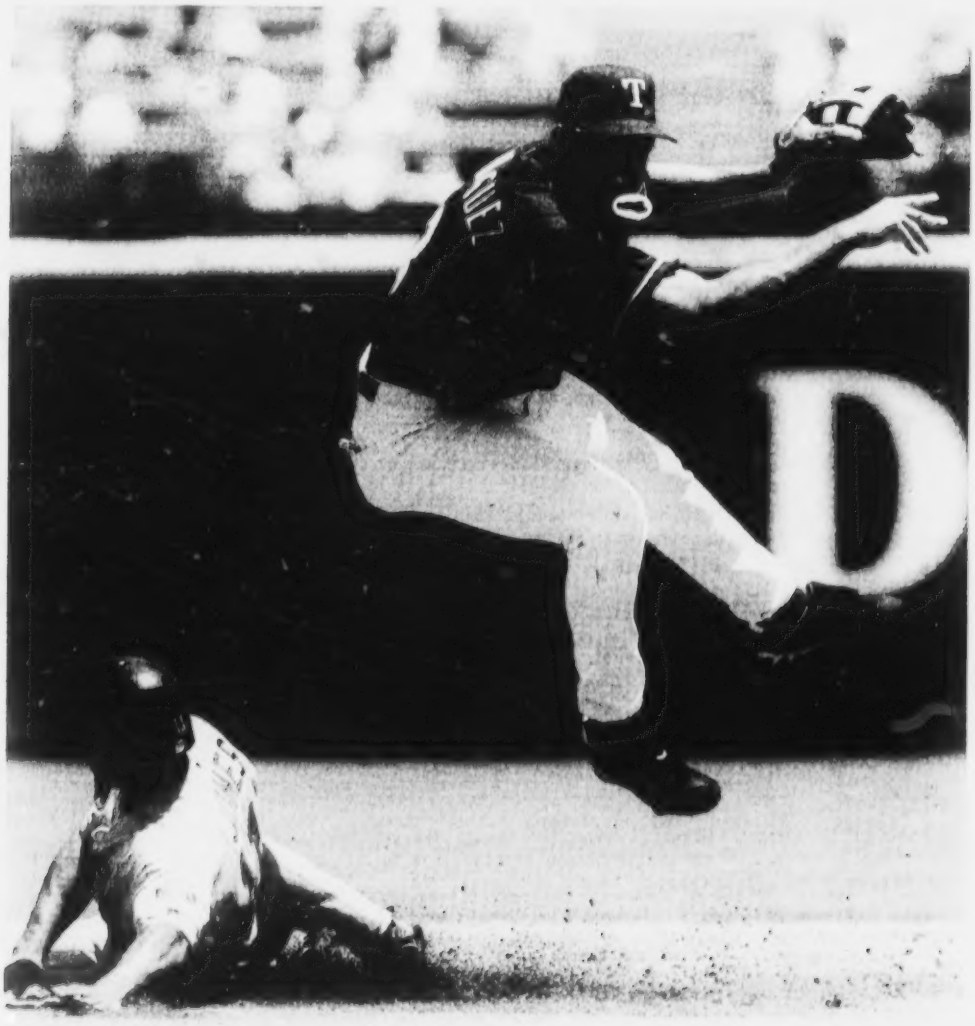
age (.606), extra base hits (77), total bases (336), and walks (100). In the playoffs, he led the Mariners to a three-game sweep of Chicago and then batted .409 in the league championship series against the defending world champions, the New York Yankees. Despite his great performance at the plate, however, the Mariners fell short against the Yankees, losing the series four games to two.

Signing a Huge Contract with the Texas Rangers

After his outstanding 2000 season, Rodriguez was due to sign a new contract—one that would undoubtedly make him one of the highest paid players in all of sports. As a free agent, he could sign with any major league team, and he wanted to explore his options. He felt that he had been underpaid during his career with the Mariners, and while he loved playing in Seattle, he knew that he could succeed in many other cities as well. For a time, it appeared as if the Mariners might make a strong enough bid to keep their young superstar. But in the end, it was an almost unbelievable offer from the Texas Rangers that won the day.

"Baseball owner Tom Hicks stunned the entire sports world when he signed Rodriguez to a $252 million contract with the Texas Rangers, making him the highest-paid athlete in any sport. Despite criticism, Hicks made no apologies for the deal. "Our judgment is that Alex will break every record in baseball before he finishes his career. And he's a great asset to the community and fans."

Rangers owner Tom Hicks stunned the entire sports world when he signed Rodriguez to a 10-year contract worth a mind-boggling $252 million. With bonuses and deferred salary, Rodriguez would average $25.2 million every year for 10 years. The contract was worth twice as much as the previous largest contract in baseball, and it made Rodriguez the highest-paid athlete in any sport. Hicks was immediately criticized by the media and by other team owners, but he made no apologies for the deal. "Our judgment is that Alex will break every record in baseball before he finishes his career," he explained. "And he's a great asset to the community and fans." Hicks and other Rangers officials felt that Rodriguez was so popular that he would draw enough extra fans to the ballpark to make up for the huge contract.



Rodriguez hangs in the air as Jacques Jones of the Minnesota Twins slides past in a double-play attempt, June 3, 2001.

Rodriguez called the move to Texas "an economic decision and a career decision." He decided to ignore the critics who called him greedy and overpaid. "I was ridiculed for four years about my contract in Seattle, people telling me that I was grossly underpaid." he revealed. "Now I'm grossly overpaid. Everything I've ever wanted, I already have. I'm already spoiled beyond anything. I feel like my life's a dream. My talent, what the man upstairs blessed me with . . . the result was my contract. But my work and my love for the game came way before that. People are going to make up their own minds. I only worry about the people I love and the people who love me."

Rodriguez was nervous when he first stared with the team, concerned about the reaction from the other players. "It was like the first day of school all over again," he said. "The veterans on this team made it easier. They wanted me here. That made me feel welcome." Rodriguez impressed his new teammates by not acting like a big shot and a know-it-all, by asking a lot of questions, by working hard, and by getting into excellent physical condition. He was determined not to let his new salary change his approach to baseball, or his enjoyment of the game. "I don't think money changes you," Rodriguez says. "You have to remember that it doesn't make you who you are. I might make a lot of money, and people make a big deal about it. I still see myself as just a baseball player." He also says that people are shocked to find out that he's a nice person. "For some reason, people feel if you are well-compensated in sports these days, you have to be a jerk."

Rodriguez was determined not to let his new salary change his approach to baseball, or his enjoyment of the game. "I don't think money changes you. You have to remember that it doesn't make you who you are. I might make a lot of money, and people make a big deal about it. I still see myself as just a baseball player. . . . For some reason, people feel if you are well-compensated in sports these days, you have to be a jerk."

Still, Rodriguez recognized that Rangers fans would expect him to hit a home run every time he stepped up to the plate to justify his huge paycheck. "There is pressure," he admitted, "but I think it's good pressure. I feel like a rookie, like I have to prove myself all over again, and I won't let the fans or the team down." By the halfway point of the 2001 season, Rodriguez had proven that he could indeed handle the pressure that came with the new contract. In August, he became the second shortstop in major league history, and only the ninth player overall, to hit 40 home runs in four straight seasons. In addition, he was on track once again to hit over .300 while driving in more than 125 runs. His only regret was that the Rangers did not seem likely to compete for a spot in the playoffs as he had hoped they would.

At just 26 years old, Rodriguez still has many years left in his career. Many observers expect that he will break a number of long-standing records before he retires. He is on a pace to potentially break Hank Aaron's all-time

home run record, for example, and he is already among the top 10 in most all-time offensive categories for shortstops. According to Cal Ripken Jr., Rodriguez's childhood hero, "Alex has a real good chance to be the best shortstop ever."

HOME AND FAMILY

Rodriguez is single and has been called one of the most eligible bachelors in the world. He was twice voted one of *People* magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People in the World. He also loves clothes and is always well-dressed in public. "Ever since I was a kid, like from the age of 10, I wanted to look sharp," he admits.

> *Rodriguez recognized that because of his huge paycheck, Rangers fans would expect him to hit a home run every time he stepped up to the plate. "There is pressure, but I think it's good pressure. I feel like a rookie, like I have to prove myself all over again, and I won't let the fans or the team down."*

Rodriguez owns homes in Preston Hollow, an exclusive suburb of Dallas, and in Kendall, the suburb of Miami where he lived as a boy. His family continues to play an important role in his life. Both of his siblings are involved in his business and charitable ventures.

Rodriguez also enjoys spending time with friends, and one of his closest friends is fellow shortstop Derek Jeter of the New York Yankees. Both players are young, talented, and single, and both enjoy the finer things in life. When their teams play against each other, they stay at each other's houses. "What's special is we support each other through good times and bad," Rodriguez said of his friend. "We can talk out our unique frustrations with each other."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In the off-season, Rodriguez enjoys golf, basketball, and video games. He also likes cars, and he owns a Land Rover and a Mercedes. He has one dog, a German shepherd named Ripper that was given to him by Jose Canseco.

Rodriguez still has close ties to the Boys and Girls Club in Miami. He returns each winter and hangs out with the kids, sometimes six days a week.

Rodriguez with children from the Boys and Girls Club in Miami.

He also donates sporting goods and other needed supplies. He contributed $1 million to build baseball fields for the club, and the baseball diamond is now named the Alex Rodriguez Baseball Field. He still talks to his former coach Eddy Rodriguez almost daily, and he refers to the older man as "the greatest influence in my life."

Rodriguez contributes to charities in other ways. During the off-season, he regularly visits elementary schools to talk to kids and stress the importance of getting an education. He emphasizes four areas during his talks —math, reading, physical fitness, and citizenship—which he calls the grand slam of success for young people. In 1998, he founded the Alex

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Rodriguez Foundation to support his charitable causes. In 2001, his first year in Texas, he bought tickets to Rangers' home games to be distributed at Boys and Girls Clubs across the state.

Because one of his mother's goals was for each of her children to graduate from college, Rodriguez has started taking classes at Miami-Dade Community College. He eventually hopes to enroll at the University of Miami. "Your mind is like any muscle," he says. "You have to use it or it fails." Rodriguez also makes a point of regularly learning new vocabulary words and using the words in conversation.

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Hit a Grand Slam, 1998 (with Greg Brown)

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Gatorade National Scholar-Athlete of the Year: 1992
Associated Press Player of the Year: 1996
Major League Baseball All-Star Team: 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001
Silver Slugger Award: 1996, 1998, 1999
Sporting News Major League Player of the Year: 1996
Players' Choice American League Player of the Year: 1998

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Thornley, Stew. *Alex Rodriguez: Slugging Shortstop,* 1998 (juvenile)

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Esquire, Apr. 2001, p.100
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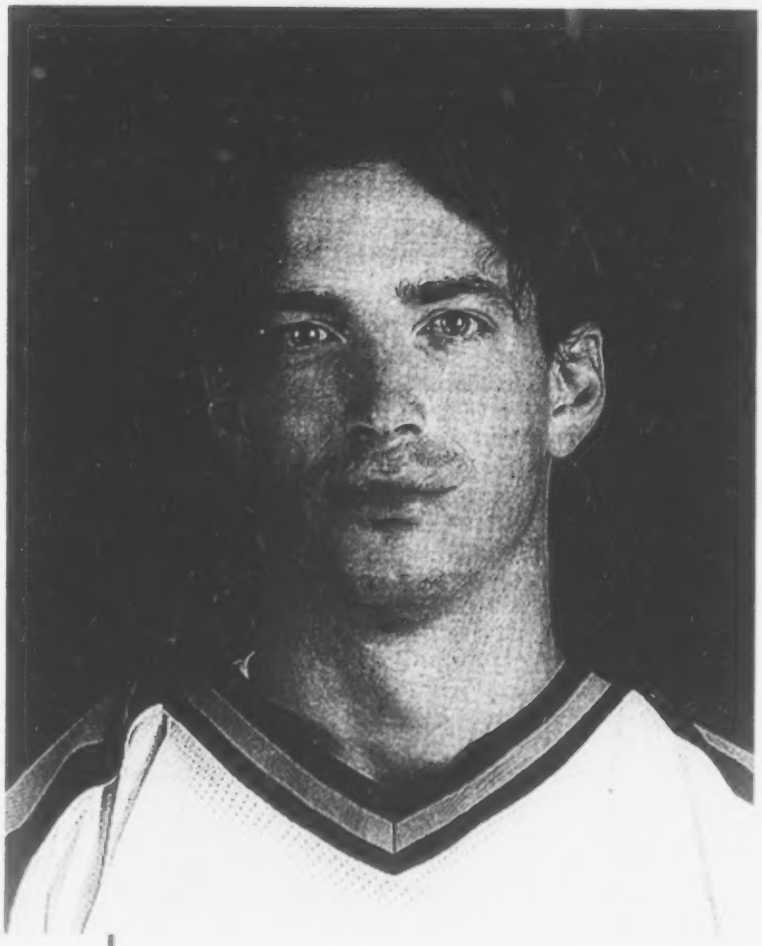
ADDRESS

Texas Rangers
The Ballpark in Arlington
1000 Ballpark Way
Arlington, TX 76011

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.mlb.com
http://rangers.mlb.com
http://www.bigleaguers.com



Joe Sakic 1969-

Canadian Professional Hockey Player with the Colorado Avalanche
Winner of the 2001 Hart Trophy as the NHL's Most Valuable Player

BIRTH

Joseph Steven Sakic (pronounced SACK-ick) was born on July 7, 1969, in Burnbary, British Columbia, Canada. His father, Marijan, is an immigrant from Croatia who came to Canada to make a better life for himself. With little money or ability to speak English, Marijan worked at a variety of jobs and eventually settled on a career in construction. Joe's mother, Slavica,

is a Croatian-Canadian. She and Marijan married in 1967 and had three children. In addition to Joe, the family includes his older sister, Rosemarie, and his younger brother, Brian, who also played professional hockey until he suffered a career-ending knee injury. The Sakic family spoke Croatian in their home, so Joe did not learn to speak English until he entered school at the age of five. This situation contributed to Sakic's development as a naturally shy person.

YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Marijan Sakic was a hard-working man who wanted his children to give their best effort in anything they did. He would not accept laziness, even in their hobbies or recreational pursuits. "I work hard," he explained. "My kids work hard. I just want them to have it better than I did and enjoy themselves."

Sakic and his brother, Brian, spent much of their youth playing hockey at the neighborhood skating rink or their homemade backyard rink. "All my friends played hockey. I had a lot of fun playing it. We grew up playing it together. I never skied or anything like that in the winter. I just wanted to play hockey and that was it."

All of the Sakic children developed an interest in ice-skating at a very young age. Rosemarie wanted to be a figure skater and earned the title of Canadian Girls Junior Figure Skating Champion in 1984. Meanwhile, Joe and Brian took up hockey. They spent much of their youth honing their skills at the neighborhood skating rink or their homemade backyard rink (built by their carpenter father). "All my friends played hockey," Sakic remembered. "I had a lot of fun playing it. We grew up playing it together. I never skied or anything like that in the winter. I just wanted to play hockey and that was it."

Sakic immediately displayed a talent for hockey, and Marijan pushed him to be the best player on his youth hockey team. "He could score as many goals as he wanted to in a game," Marijan said. "But he liked to pass more and make his teammates score. He always was a team player." Sakic credited his father with much of his success. "My dad got me into the sport," he recalled. "He drove me to all the rinks and made me stickhandle in the basement."

From the moment he took up hockey, Sakic knew that he wanted to play in the National Hockey League (NHL). He kept pushing himself to achieve

this dream. When he was in his early teens, Sakic led Burnaby's Bantam A team to the British Columbia and Canadian national championships. By the time he was 17, while still in high school, he was playing junior hockey professionally for the Swift Current Broncos in the Western Hockey League (WHL). Playing for the Broncos meant that Sakic had to move to the province of Saskatchewan and live with a local family. During this time, he enrolled at the Swift Current Comprehensive High School. While there he met a young girl named Debbie Metivier, who would eventually become his wife. But he quit school before graduating in order to pursue a career in professional hockey.

On December 30, 1986, the Swift Current Broncos were traveling to a road game on the team bus when it hit a patch of ice and skidded off the road. Four of the players were killed. Sakic avoided physical injury but suffered deep emotional scars. "It was the toughest thing I ever had to go through. It did affect me. But I never let anything out. It's just the way I am."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

WHL—The Swift Current Broncos

Sakic's first season with the Swift Current Broncos was a tremendous success. He scored 60 goals and tallied 73 assists while leading his team to the WHL playoffs. Unfortunately, these triumphs were overshadowed by a horrible tragedy. On December 30, 1986, Sakic and his teammates were traveling to a road game on the team bus when the vehicle hit a patch of ice. It skidded off the road and rolled down a hill. Four of the players—Scott Kruger, Trent Kresse, Brent Ruff, and Chris Mantyka—were killed. Sakic, who had been sitting at the front of the bus, avoided physical injury but suffered deep emotional scars. "It was the toughest thing I ever had to go through," he said. "It did affect me. But I never let anything out. It's just the way I am."

Sakic's poise and skill during his first season with the Broncos caught the attention of NHL scouts. In the spring of 1987, the NHL held its annual draft. The Quebec Nordiques were so impressed with Sakic that they arranged a deal with the Washington Capitals to move up to the 15th overall pick in order to acquire him. Sakic could have played with the Nordiques that year, but he decided that another year with Swift Current would be better for his overall game. "I know I have a few weaknesses," he

Sakic (center) of the Quebec Nordiques scuffles with Glen Wesley (right) of the Boston Bruins, as Bruins' goalie Andy Moog (left) makes a save, April 8, 1993.

explained. "I really have to strengthen my upper body. I'm leaving with the firm intention of making the team next year." The management of the Nordiques was disappointed, but honored Sakic's decision.

His choice proved to be the correct one. Sakic's second season with the Broncos was an even greater success than his first. He scored 78 goals (including four in the final game of the season) and notched 82 assists to tie Theoren Fleury of Moose Jaw for the WHL scoring title. This amazing offensive display earned Sakic the honor of being named the Canadian Major Junior Player of the Year. The day after this award was announced, Sakic made good on his promise and signed with the Quebec Nordiques.

NHL — The Quebec Nordiques

The Quebec Nordiques were a team that desperately needed a savior. In recent seasons, they had performed poorly and landed in financial trouble. But with Sakic's arrival, team management saw hope for the future. They even gave the young player jersey number 88 in order to invoke the spirit of Sakic's idol, Wayne Gretzky, who wore the famed number 99 for the Edmonton Oilers.

But Sakic struggled under the pressure of high expectations. He finished his 1988-89 rookie season with a respectable 23 goals and 39 assists for 62 points (hockey players receive a point for every goal they score or assist on). But his personal statistics did little to help the team, and the Nordiques tied the New York Islanders for the worst record in the league. Furthermore, Sakic's shy nature made it difficult for him to establish himself as a leader with his teammates. He also ruffled the feathers of the French-speaking Quebec media by hiding in the training room after games and avoiding interviews. He eventually earned the nickname of "Quoteless Joe." Sakic admitted that he sometimes felt uncomfortable around others. "I wouldn't say I'm shy. I just don't like to elaborate much," he said.

At the start of the 1989-90 season, Sakic changed his jersey number to 19. Many saw his decision as an attempt to remove the Gretzky-like expectations from his shoulders and place himself in more realistic company with Steve Yzerman, who wore the same number for the Detroit Red Wings. Yzerman was a star in his own right, but not to the same extent as Gretzky. In addition, Yzerman started his career with a poor Detroit team and led it to respectability in just four seasons. Sakic felt that this was an attainable goal for himself and the Nordiques. Sakic improved on his rookie season by scoring 39 goals and registering 63 assists for 102 points, but the team remained pathetic and won only 12 games that season.

Gaining Maturity as a Player

During the next few seasons, Sakic continued to grow as a player. In 1990-91, he scored 48 goals and tallied 61 assists for 109 points. In November of that season, he made an uncharacteristic show of leadership by publicly urging Nordiques management to trade the rights to the young hockey superstar Eric Lindros, a top draft choice who refused to play for the team. Quebec eventually traded Lindros to the Philadelphia Flyers for goalie Ron Hextall, center Peter Forsberg, forwards Mike Ricci and Chris Simon, defensemen Steve Duchesne and Kerry Huffman, two future number one draft picks, and $15 million in cash. This blockbuster deal would lay the groundwork for the future success of the franchise.

The following season, Sakic posted 94 points by scoring 29 goals and assisting on 65 others. He was quickly becoming a superstar, but the team continued to lose and failed to make the playoffs again. Playing for a perennial loser meant that Sakic was relatively unknown to hockey fans around the league. Surprisingly, the naturally shy center preferred it this way. "To start out in a small market where nobody paid much attention was the best thing for me," he noted. "I don't go looking for attention. I'm

not the rah-rah type." Still, he hated to lose, and the team's poor performance eventually became a source of anguish for him. "My first couple of years here, I was just excited to be in the league," he remarked. "But then the losing starts getting frustrating, and you start to find yourself not enjoying the game anymore."

But everything changed in the 1992-93 season. The Nordiques locked up Sakic for three years (with an option for a fourth) by signing him to contract that would pay him a total of $8.8 million. The team also decided that it was time for Sakic to emerge as a leader and named him team captain. This move raised the eyebrows of many observers. They wondered if the bashful young man was ready for the leadership pressures that would come with such an honor.

"When Sakic was playing for the Quebec Nordiques, the team's poor performance became a source of anguish for him. "My first couple of years here, I was just excited to be in the league. But then the losing starts getting frustrating, and you start to find yourself not enjoying the game anymore."

Despite the fact that his new contract called for him to reach out to the city, the fans, and the media by learning basic French, Sakic decided to let his performance on the ice do most of the talking. He racked up 48 goals and 57 assists for 105 points. More importantly, the Nordiques increased their point total in one season from 42 to 104 (NHL teams receive two points for a win and one point for a tie; the point totals are used to determine league standings). The team's record was good enough to place them second in their division and put them in the playoffs for the first time in Sakic's career. The Nordiques lost in the first round to the eventual Stanley Cup Champions, the Montreal Canadians, but Sakic at last saw hope for the team. "I've been here through the tough stuff, I'd like to be here through all the good stuff, the winning stuff," he said. "We have a heck of a team here, and I want to be part of it. The glory days are coming to Quebec."

Unfortunately, the following season proved to be a bit of a disappointment. Sakic continued to shine by netting 28 goals and 64 assists for 92 points, but the Nordiques missed the playoffs. The team bounced back in the strike-shortened season of 1994-95, which saw Sakic record 19 goals and 43 assists for 62 points in just 47 games. Even more impressive, the

Sakic celebrates after the Avalanche won the Stanley Cup, June 10, 1996.

Nordiques finished the season with the best overall record in the Eastern Conference. But Sakic's second playoff appearance proved to be another disappointment, as the team again bowed out in the first round to the eventual champs, the New York Rangers.

The Nordiques Become the Colorado Avalanche

In the spring of 1995, the Nordiques announced a surprise move. For years, the team's management had been negotiating with the city to keep the

Nordiques in Quebec. But when these talks failed to produce an agreement, the team's management made a dramatic decision. On June 21, 1995, it was announced that the franchise was being sold to a new ownership group in the United States. The new owners planned to relocate the team to Denver, Colorado, and call it the Colorado Avalanche.

This move proved to be a breath of fresh air for Sakic and his teammates. Denver fans embraced their new team, known as the Avs for short, and Sakic had his best overall season in 1995-96. He scored the most goals (51), assists (69), and points (120) of his entire NHL career. His performance placed him third in the league in scoring. More importantly, the team placed second in the Western Conference behind the Detroit Red Wings, who had set an NHL record for most victories in a season, and made the playoffs once again.

Sakic and the Avalanche rolled over the Vancouver Canucks and Chicago Blackhawks in the first and second rounds of the playoffs to set up a showdown with Detroit. The high-flying Wings proved to be no match for the Avalanche in the Western Conference Finals. Sakic scored two goals in front of the hometown fans in game six to put the Avalanche in the Stanley Cup Finals. "It feels great," Sakic said. "Everybody worked hard, this building was electrified. It was so much fun tonight."

The surging Avalanche then met the Florida Panthers in the finals. Colorado dominated Florida in the first three games to take a 3-0 series lead. But the fourth game turned out a bit differently. At the end of regulation time, the teams were knotted in a scoreless tie. After two overtime periods, the score remained the same. Finally, Sakic's teammate Uwe Krupp ended the game in the third overtime period with a wicked slapshot past Florida netminder John Vanbiesbrouck. The Colorado Avalanche had won the 1996 Stanley Cup.

On a personal level, Sakic had an amazing playoff run, scoring 18 goals (including a record-tying 6 game-winners) and 16 assists for 34 points. His impressive effort earned him the Conn Smythe Trophy as the playoff's most valuable player. The honor capped a season that Sakic will never forget. "There is no greater satisfaction than winning the Cup," he said. "Just thinking about it makes me speechless."

Defending the Cup

The 1996-97 campaign was a disappointing one for the reigning Stanley Cup champions. During the season, Sakic suffered the first major injury of

his career when an opponent's skate cut his Achilles tendon during a game against the Philadelphia Flyers. The injury caused Sakic to miss 17 games, but he still managed to finish the season with 74 points (22 goals and 52 assists). Despite the setback of losing their captain, Colorado won the President's Trophy for having the league's best record. This time, however, the Avs were bounced from the playoffs by the Detroit Red Wings, who would go on to clinch the Cup. The loss stunned Sakic, who had dreams of repeating as the NHL champion. "The toughest thing for me is knowing we didn't play up to our potential," he stated. "I had such a hollow feeling. I knew that it was the end of the run."

"The Avs' loss in the 1997 playoffs stunned Sakic, who had dreams of repeating as the NHL champion. "The toughest thing for me is knowing we didn't play up to our potential. I had such a hollow feeling. I knew that it was the end of the run."

Following their disappointing 1997 playoff performance, Sakic and the Avalanche were faced with a unique situation. For the first time in his career, Sakic was a restricted free agent. This meant that the superstar could shop himself around the league in search of a rich contract offer, but the Avalanche retained the right to match it and keep Sakic from leaving. In August, the New York Rangers offered Sakic a three-year contract for $21 million, including a $15 million signing bonus. The deal was designed to make it extremely difficult for the frugal Avalanche management to match. But Sakic had mixed feelings about the situation.

On one hand, he felt loyalty toward the only organization that he had ever played for, and he enjoyed playing in Denver. On the other hand, the Rangers' offer was too good to ignore, and the lure of playing in New York was intriguing. "I'm in a good position, either way," he admitted. "I either get to stay here or I get to go to another great city. I wouldn't have signed [the initial offer sheet] if I didn't want to go there. Everyone knows how much I like it here, but if I go to New York I know I'll like it there, too." In the end, the Avalanche realized that a future without their captain was a bleak one and matched New York's offer. Sakic was pleased with the result. "I'm very happy things worked out in Colorado," he remarked. "I think they're sending a message that they want to win. They'll do what they can to keep their core guys together."

Sakic (19) scores on New Jersey Devils' goalie Martin Brodeur (left) during the Stanley Cup finals, May 26, 2001.

An Appearance in the Olympics Proves Costly

Early in the 1997–98 season, Sakic was chosen to represent Canada in the Olympics. The 1998 Games in Nagano, Japan, marked the first time that NHL players were allowed to compete in the Olympics. So many professional players wanted to represent their countries that the NHL scheduled an official break in the middle of the season to allow them to compete. Sakic was excited about the challenge, but he suffered a knee injury during a game against Kazakhstan. Canada finished the Olympic tournament without a medal. Worse yet, the injury forced Sakic to miss 18 NHL games when the season resumed. The Avalanche finished in sixth place overall (down from first place in the previous season) and were upset in the first round of the playoffs by the Edmonton Oilers. Sakic's statistics for the season included 27 goals and 36 assists for 63 points.

The next several seasons found Sakic maintaining his status as one of the game's elite players, despite more injuries and the Avs' failure to advance to the Stanley Cup Finals again. In 1998–99, Sakic had another stellar year with 41 goals and 55 assists for 96 points, but the Avs lost to the eventual

champions, the Dallas Stars, in the Western Conference Finals. In 1999-2000, Sakic missed 22 games with assorted ailments, including torn rib cartilage, a pulled groin, and a nagging illness. He still managed to get 81 points for the season (28 goals and 53 assists). But the playoffs were a different story. Sakic had his worst playoff performance ever, netting just 2 goals and 7 assists in 17 games. And like the previous year, Colorado was eliminated from Cup contention by Dallas in the Conference Finals.

In the 2000 off-season, Sakic signed a one-year contract with Colorado for $7.9 million. After the 2001 playoffs, he would become an unrestricted free agent and control his own destiny. Although the one-year deal left his future with the Avs uncertain, Sakic seemed content with the situation. "We're here for another year and we'll worry about the rest next off-season," he stated. "You know what? I'm not worried past this year. That'll work itself out next summer. I'm here for this year, and then we'll see after that."

The Avalanche Return to Glory

Sakic started out slowly during the 2000-01 season, but he finished the season strong. He avoided injury and appeared in all 82 games, scoring 54 goals and assisting on 64 others for a whopping 118 points. Meanwhile, the team was extremely successful, setting franchise records for wins (52) and points (118). During the playoffs, the Avs breezed past the Vancouver Canucks, Los Angeles Kings, and St. Louis Blues to secure a spot in the Stanley Cup Finals for the first time in five years. Their opponents were the Eastern Conference champions, the New Jersey Devils. The series was tough, but the Avalanche won the Stanley Cup in six games. Sakic redeemed himself for his poor playoff performance the previous year by scoring 13 goals and getting 13 assists in 21 games.

Five days later, the NHL held its annual awards ceremony. Sakic took home three prestigious awards: the Hart Trophy as the league's most valuable player; the Lady Byng Trophy for outstanding sportsmanship; and the Lester B. Pearson Award as the league's top performer as chosen by his fellow NHL players. When it was all over, Sakic summed it up in his typical understated fashion: "Wow. It's been a pretty good week."

Keeping the Team Together

Sakic's amazing 2000-01 campaign put him in a powerful position to get the contract he always wanted. For the first time in his 13-year career, he would be an unrestricted free agent, meaning that any team could bid on his services and he would be free to accept the highest offer. Most ob-

Sakic with the Hart Trophy (left), Stanley Cup (center), and Lady Byng Trophy (right), June 14, 2001.

servers predicted that his MVP-performance would net him a contract in the $10 to $12 million per year range. Sakic was confident that the situation would work itself out and downplayed the contract issue. "I don't find it a big deal, and I don't think it should ever be an issue," he said. "There are too many issues about contracts in sports, and it drives everybody nuts."

After the Avs' exciting Stanley Cup victory in 2001, the first priority for team management was to figure out how to keep the team together for another cup run in 2002. The first blow came when legendary defenseman Ray Bourque announced his retirement. Then the team had to find a way to sign their three superstar unrestricted free agents: Sakic, goaltender Patrick Roy, and defenseman Rob Blake. The loss of any one of these players could severely cripple the Avs' chances for a repeat Cup victory. Rumors began to surface that the New York Rangers were again expressing interest in luring Sakic away from Colorado.

In an unprecedented display of solidarity, Sakic, Roy, and Blake banded together and decided not to test the free agent waters. On June 30, 2001, just

before the signing deadline, the trio agreed to multiyear contracts that would keep the core of the Avalanche intact for the next several seasons. Sakic's five-year deal featured a no-trade clause and a total salary of $50.5 million. Upon signing his contract, Sakic remarked: "Remaining a member of the Avalanche was my main goal, and re-signing with the team is great news for my family and me. I have been in this organization all of my career and it looks like I will have a good chance to make it my whole career. I'm proud to be captain of this hockey club and also happy to pursue my career in Denver, a special place and unique place not only to play hockey, but also to raise my family."

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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Joe Sakic is married to his high school sweetheart, Debbie Metivier. The couple have three children, a son named Mitchell, and twins named Chase (a girl) and Cameron (a boy). Sakic also continues to have a close relationship with his parents. His hard-working father Marijan was forced to retire from the construction business at an early age because of an injured back, but Sakic's wealth allows his parents to lead a comfortable life.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Joe and Debbie Sakic are very active in the Denver community. In the past, they have co-hosted the Food Bank of the Rockies charity golf tournament. Sakic is also an avid sports fan and enjoys following Dallas Cowboys football, Seattle SuperSonics basketball, and Seattle Mariners baseball. He also is a student of the game of hockey and considers Wayne Gretzky to be his all-time favorite player. One thrilling moment in Sakic's career came when he had to face Gretzky for the first time. "I looked up for a face-off and there he was," Sakic recalled. "He won the face-off, got free, and scored on me." Among current players, Sakic enjoys watching his teammate Peter Forsberg.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Canadian Major Junior Player of the Year: 1988
WHL All-Star: 1988
NHL All-Star: 1990-1998, 2001
Conn Smythe Award: 1996, for most valuable player of the playoffs
Hart Trophy: 2001, for most valuable player of the league
Lady Byng Trophy: 2001, for outstanding sportsmanship
Lester B. Pearson Award: 2001, for league's top performer, as chosen by fellow NHL players

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http://www.coloradoavalanche.com
http://www.nhlpa.com

Annika Sorenstam 1970-

Swedish Professional Golfer
Winner of Three LPGA Grand Slam Titles

BIRTH

Annika (AH-nick-ah) Sorenstam was born on October 9, 1970, in Stockholm, Sweden. Her father, Tom Sorenstam, was a marketing executive. Her mother, Gunilla Sorenstam, worked at home, caring for Annika and her younger sister, Charlotta.

YOUTH

Sorenstam grew up in an athletic family. Both of her parents were fine athletes who competed in a wide range of orga-

nized sports activities, including basketball, handball, golf, and track and field. This level of participation in sports is not unusual in Sweden, where society places a high value on sports and athletic competition. The Swedish government even sponsors a national sports program that makes sure that every child can play a sport they enjoy. According to Sorenstam, this program provides a good foundation for young athletes: "We have a very good junior program in Sweden. With organized practices and tournaments, kids get good basics and fundamentals at an early age."

As youngsters, both of the Sorenstam sisters first fell in love with tennis. Annika started playing tennis at age five, and before long her primary sports heroes were such Swedish tennis stars as Bjorn Borg and Mats Wilander. As she grew older, she became a nationally ranked junior player, as did her sister Charlotta, or "Lotta" as her family called her.

Sorenstam says that her mother jokingly took credit for her daughter's growing enthusiasm for golf. "My mom started playing golf when she was pregnant with me. She always says that's how I got the vibrations for golf."

Starting to Play Golf

During Sorenstam's teen years, however, she decided to abandon tennis and devote herself to golf. She enjoyed the unique challenges of golf, which she first played at age 12. Another advantage of golf, as far as she was concerned, was that players could compete on a wide variety of courses. But most of all, Sorenstam liked the fact that she could play golf without worrying about finding other players. "In tennis you need someone to play with, but in golf I could go and hit balls whenever I wanted to," she explained. A few years later, her younger sister also switched to golf.

As Sorenstam spent more time on the golf course, she discovered that she had a natural talent for the game. Her mother, meanwhile, jokingly took credit for her oldest daughter's growing enthusiasm for the sport. "My mom started playing golf when she was pregnant with me," Sorenstam explained. "She always says that's how I got the vibrations for golf."

Within months of picking up golf clubs for the first time, Sorenstam was competing in junior tournaments all across Sweden. By her mid-teens, she was obviously one of the country's top young players. But she was so painfully shy that she purposely lost tournaments in order to avoid giving

When she was young, Sorenstam was so painfully shy that she purposely lost tournaments in order to avoid giving victory speeches. "I hated standing up and having to say something. I still hate it today. I have never been a person who has been seeking attention. Like in school, I very seldom raised my hands and answered the questions. I just sort of stayed by myself."

victory speeches. "I hated standing up and having to say something," she later admitted. "I still hate it today. I have never been a person who has been seeking attention. Like in school, I very seldom raised my hands and answered the questions. I just sort of stayed by myself."

Sorenstam eventually learned to endure post-tournament victory speeches, though, and at age 16 she qualified for the Swedish Golf Federation national junior team. Her participation on the national junior team was a turning point in her career. Her coaches' steady guidance and encouragement greatly boosted her self-confidence. "They look at golfers as whole people, and place value on young people's development as human beings, not just as golfers," she said.

In 1987 Sorenstam was promoted to Sweden's national golf team. She spent the next five years competing on behalf of her country in international competitions and dreaming about a possible future as a professional golfer. During this period she was inspired by Lisolette Neumann, a fellow female golfer from Sweden who won the U.S. Women's Open in 1988. "It was a delayed telecast, but I remember staying up all night to watch [the tournament]," recalled Sorenstam. "I did think, 'Yeah, that could be me someday.'"

EDUCATION

Sorenstam attended schools in Sweden for most of her childhood. But she also studied in London, England, for four years in the early 1980s after her father was transferred to the city for work. When she returned to Sweden, she considered pursuing a degree in chemical engineering at one of her country's major universities. In 1990, however, Sorenstam played so well in one international competition that the University of Arizona in Tucson offered her a full scholarship to play on its women's golf team.

Sorenstam quickly accepted the offer. But she later admitted that her excitement about living in the United States was mixed with some fear about

relocating to an unfamiliar land of strangers. "I didn't even know where [Arizona] was on the map," she recalled. "I'm lucky I didn't wind up in Idaho with snow up to my waist. It was a little bit of a culture shock. I hadn't seen a cactus before."

After arriving in Tucson, however, Sorenstam made herself at home. Determined to make the most of her experience at Arizona, she signed up for a full load of math and engineering courses. She enjoyed studying these subjects, but as the months passed by her schedule did become very hectic. "I worked real hard," she recalled. "We got up early in the morning—sometimes you had to work out early—then go to class at 8 o'clock. I would leave campus at 12, and be on the golf course by 1, and then I would leave when it was dark. And then you had to study. When Friday night came, there was no question of going out. It was laundry time."

At first, Sorenstam's teammates and coaches might have harbored secret doubts about her abilities to juggle her golf and school responsibilities. But as the 1991 NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) golf season progressed, she put any such fears to rest. Even though she was only a freshman, she captured the NCAA individual women's golfing championship and was named college player of the year. One year later, she won the PAC-10 Conference championship and was runner-up for the NCAA championship. She also marched to the 1992 World Amateur Championship and finished second at the U.S. Women's Amateur Championship.

Sorenstam worked hard in college to combine her school work and her golf practice, and her schedule became very hectic."We got up early in the morning—sometimes you had to work out early—then go to class at 8 o'clock. I would leave campus at 12, and be on the golf course by 1, and then I would leave when it was dark. And then you had to study. When Friday night came, there was no question of going out. It was laundry time."

Once the 1992 season ended, however, Sorenstam decided that she was ready to leave Arizona and join the pro ranks. Part of this decision was due to a feeling that her coaches were exercising too much control over her life. "I was brought up to think for myself, to decide what I need to do on my own," she said. "So for me it was really hard. You don't come all the way from Sweden to the States to study and live by yourself if you're

not independent." But she also left the university program because it was clear that she had the skills to compete at the professional level.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Rookie of the Year on Two Continents

Sorenstam spent her first year as a professional golfer in Europe as a member of the WPG (Women's Professional Golf) tour, the professional golf tour in Europe. She played well throughout the summer of 1993, earning WPG Rookie of the Year honors. In 1994 Sorenstam continued to play in some WPG events, but she also began competing in events in the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association), which is the women's professional golf tour in the U.S.

"I didn't know a tournament could be so scary," Sorenstam said about winning the 1995 U.S. Open. "It's like a dream. It's the biggest tournament in the world you can win. I thought only supermen did it. For me, it's the world championship."

On the professional golf circuit, most tournaments take place over four days. Each day, all the players shoot one "round" of 18 holes. After four rounds, the scores are totaled and the player with the lowest score wins the tournament. In golf scoring, "par" refers to the standard number of strokes it should take a player to complete each hole. For example, most golf courses include short holes, which are usually designated as "par 3," as well as longer holes, which are designated as "par 5." On a regulation, 18-hole golf course, par for all holes will add up to 72. Depending on the number of strokes taken on a given hole, a player can shoot par, a hole in one, a birdie (one under par), an eagle (two under par), a bogey (one over par), a double bogey (two over par), etc. There are many tournaments on the professional golf tour, but the most prestigious are the four major or "Grand Slam" events: the British Open, the Nabisco Championship, the U.S. Women's Open, and the McDonald's LPGA Championship.

When Sorenstam joined the LPGA Tour in 1994, she made her presence felt immediately. She finished in the top ten in three different events and drew praise everywhere she went for her poise and solid golfing skills. The highlight of her rookie LPGA season was her second-place showing at the Women's British Open, one of the Grand Slam events. This impressive per-

Sorenstam holding her trophy after winning the U.S. Women's Open, July 16, 1995.

formance enabled her to claim Rookie of the Year honors on the LPGA Tour in 1994, one year after winning the same award in Europe.

Winning the U.S. Open

In 1995 Sorenstam officially joined the ranks of elite women golfers when she won the U.S. Women's Open by one stroke, holding off several challengers in a tense final round. That victory was especially rewarding because the U.S. Women's Open is such a prestigious tournament. "I didn't know a tournament could be so scary," she later admitted. "It's like a dream. It's the biggest tournament in the world you can win. I thought only supermen did it. For me, it's the world championship." When she called her parents to share the good news of her victory, she was unable to

contain the surge of emotions she was feeling. Elated and relieved, she broke down and cried as she told her folks about her triumph.

Sorenstam's victory pleased many other players as well. They knew that the Swedish star was quiet and liked to maintain a measure of privacy, but they also respected her abilities and appreciated her pleasant, low-key style. "Annika's a terrific player, but we already knew that before she won the Open," said former LPGA Commissioner Charlie Mechem. "What separates her is she's genuine. A sweeter person you will not find."

With her first Grand Slam title secured away, Sorenstam proceeded to tear up the LPGA Tour for the remainder of the 1995 campaign. She won the GHP Heartland Classic with ease, beating the rest of the field by ten strokes. She also won the Samsung World Championship of Women's Golf with a 45 foot chip-in on the first hole of a sudden-death playoff. By the time the 1995 season was over, the quiet Swede had become the first non-American ever to win the LPGA's Vare Trophy, given every year to the player who posts the season's lowest scoring average. Sorenstam also became the second international player ever to win the Rolex Player of the Year Award, and she became the first golfer ever to lead both the LPGA and European tours in prize money in the same season. Her performance made her such a hero in her native Sweden that the Swedish government issued a postage stamp in her honor.

Adjusting to the Media Spotlight

Sorenstam's spectacular 1995 season brought her wealth and fame. She welcomed most of the changes in her life, but at times the sudden attention from fans and media overwhelmed her. "My life has changed a lot in the past six months," she said at the end of the season. "Most of everything that's happened is good, but some is bad. I like the attention to a point, but I'm a private person." Indeed, Sorenstam's quiet nature even led her to turn down an invitation to appear on the David Letterman show. She later attributed her desire to avoid the spotlight to her Swedish background. "We take a while to get to know each other," she said.

The constant demand for interviews and autographs finally wore Sorenstam out to the point that she skipped the first few weeks of the 1996 LPGA season. She decided to take the time off so that she could relax and think about all the recent changes in her life. "[The attention] got to be too much," she explained. "It made me sick . . . emotionally drained. In the beginning, I was really happy. In the end, it was too much. I wasn't used to it. I wasn't prepared. How do you prepare?" She also used the time to set new

goals for herself. "I had to take time to think about the season overall," she said. "I mean, I did things [in 1995 that] I didn't think I could do in a career. Where do I go from here? The last thing I wanted to do was to be burned out and be tired of golf. It's no fun if you don't enjoy it."

When Sorenstam did rejoin the LPGA Tour, she remained quiet and reserved. But since that time, she has learned to deal with her celebrity status with grace and patience. "I am naturally a private person but every day that passes I become more comfortable with my situation," she said. "I still do not go out and seek interviews but I know my responsibilities to ladies' golf. And people's expectations do not scare me as much now because I know I can get the job done."

"There is nothing particularly flashy about Sorenstam's golf," John Barton wrote in Golf Digest. *"She doesn't dazzle you with a smorgasbord of different, flamboyant golf shots. She just drills [the ball] down the middle [of the fairway], at the flag, and holes a lot of putts. Whether it's over 18 holes, four rounds, a year, or a career, she'll keep on doing it longer than you."*

A Fierce Competitor

As the 1996 LPGA season progressed, Sorenstam added three more tournament victories to her career total. The most rewarding of these titles was winning the U.S. Women's Open for the second year in a row, earning her second Grand Slam title. Her victory in that prestigious event enabled her to surpass the $1 million mark in career earnings. It also solidified her reputation as one of the finest women golfers in the world.

Inevitably, Sorenstam's impressive entrance onto the LPGA stage prompted many observers to speculate about her long-term future. Most golf experts agreed that she had the potential to become one of the all-time greats of women's golf, in part because her game was so steady and fundamentally sound. "There is nothing particularly flashy about Sorenstam's golf," John Barton wrote in *Golf Digest*. "She doesn't dazzle you with a smorgasbord of different, flamboyant golf shots. She just drills [the ball] down the middle [of the fairway], at the flag, and holes a lot of putts. Whether it's over 18 holes, four rounds, a year, or a career, she'll keep on doing it longer than you."

For her part, Sorenstam attributed much of her early success on the tour to her competitive spirit. "I can't stand to lose at anything," she once declared. "And I guess that's why I practice so much. I don't experiment with new stances and new grips, like some others do. I stay with what has worked for me and I grind and grind and grind."

Sorenstam is also known for her love of statistics. "Each time Sorenstam plays, she makes notations in a little book, keeping track of greens in regulation, distance of putts, number of fairways hit and what mood she is in," explained Debbie Becker in *USA Today*. "Sorenstam puts all this into a spreadsheet to track her game and determine what help she needs. Her laptop computer has all her statistics since 1989."

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Continued Success on the Tour

In 1997 Sorenstam continued her winning ways, claiming six LPGA tournament victories and winning her second Rolex Player of the Year Award. But she failed in her attempt to become the first player ever to win three straight U.S. Opens. In fact, she performed so poorly during the first two days of the tournament that she "missed the cut."This term means that her score was too high to qualify for the last two days of the tournament. About half of the golfers in every tournament fail to make the cut, but it was very unusual for Sorenstam.

Sorenstam remained one of the LPGA's elite players in 1998. She won four tournaments over the course of the season. She also threatened to become the first player in LPGA history to finish a season with a scoring average below 70. "Breaking 70 has been a goal of mine since I came out on tour," she said. "It would mean tons. It's the ultimate number."When the season finally ended, Sorenstam was delighted to find that her average for the season was 69.99.

In 1999 Sorenstam only reached the winner's circle on one occasion. She expressed disappointment at only winning one tournament, but observers noted that the lone victory gave her more LPGA tournament titles (18) than any other player in the 1990s. She also crossed the $4 million mark in career earnings during the season. These milestones pleased Sorenstam,

Sorenstam hitting the ball out of the sand, April 12, 2001.

but she knew that her place at the top of the tour was now in doubt. After all, she finished fourth on the LPGA money list in 1999 after topping the list the previous two years. In fact, some observers claimed after the 1999 season that Australian golfer Karrie Webb had emerged as the LPGA's best player. (For further information on Webb, see *Biography Today Sports Series*, Vol. 5.)

Both Sorenstam and Webb were fiery competitors. But they kept their growing rivalry a friendly one, with each player going out of the way to say nice things about the other. For example, Sorenstam claimed that "when Karrie came along it was also great for me personally because it motivated me. She's a great player and I'm very impressed with her. It's important for me to look up to somebody and say, 'What is she good at?' and 'What can I improve to beat her?'"

During the last few holes of her 2001 record-breaking game, Sorenstam recalled that the crowd became almost eerily quiet. "It was like a pitcher with a no-hitter," said fellow LPGA golfer Meg Mallon. "Nobody said a word so they wouldn't mess it up for her."

Regaining the Winning Touch

At the conclusion of the 1999 season, Sorenstam admitted that "I was disappointed in my year, the way I played. I looked at myself and my game and what I thought I needed to do to improve and get to the top, and it is not something that happens overnight." Determined to return to her winning ways, she practiced her game all winter long.

When the 2000 season rolled around, Sorenstam reaped the benefits of her long months of hard work. She won five tournaments and earned a career-high $1.33 million over the course of the year. The most memorable of these victories came at the Welch's/Circle K Championship. In this tournament, she outdueled Pat Hurst in a tense, sudden-death playoff. The win not only gave Sorenstam her first title of the year, but also qualified her for induction into the LPGA Hall of Fame. She will be inducted at the conclusion of the 2003 season, when she will have met the 10-year tour membership requirement for acceptance into the hall.

Sorenstam expressed great satisfaction about earning a place in the Hall of Fame, and she was happy to regain her winning touch. But when the season was over, she pointed out that she failed to win any Grand Slam

events. She also noticed that Webb earned about $400,000 more than she did. "I had a good year, but Karrie had an exceptional year, so I was still behind," she said.

After the 2000 season, Sorenstam launched an intensive off-season workout program with the aim of regaining her unofficial LPGA crown from Webb. Five days each week, she performed intensive weight and aerobic workouts, including kickboxing and taekwondo, under the supervision of a personal trainer. She also worked on her putting—which she thought was the weakest part of her game—for hours and hours at a time.

When the 2001 LPGA season began, Sorenstam was ready. She roared out of the gates, winning four of the first six tournaments in which she played and finishing second the other two times. This fabulous streak included one tournament in which she rallied from 10 strokes behind to win, setting a new LPGA record for largest come-from-behind victory. She also won the Nabisco Championship for the first time. This victory gave Sorenstam her first Grand Slam title since 1996.

"When Sorenstam dropped her ball into the cup at the 18th hole to finish with a 59 score, the gallery erupted in cheers as she leaped into the arms of her caddy. "I'm absolutely overwhelmed," she said after completing her historic round. "I can't believe what I just did."

Shooting a Record-Low 59

Sorenstam also made headlines with one of the most remarkable rounds of golf ever played by any golfer, man or woman. On March 16, 2001, she shot a remarkable score of 59 (13 birdies, no bogies) on her way to victory at the Standard Register Ping golf tournament. No one had ever posted a score lower than 60 in an LPGA tournament, so Sorenstam's feat made headlines on sports pages all around the world.

When asked about her record-breaking score, Sorenstam admitted that she knew she had a chance to break 60 after she shot birdies on her first eight holes. At one point in her incredible run, her playing partner for the day patted her on the back after she made a birdie. Sorenstam turned to her and joked, "Don't hit me too hard because I'll wake up." As the round continued, the gallery following her swelled in size with each passing hole. Everyone wanted to see if she could break 60 for the round. But Sor-

Sorenstam jumps into the arms of her caddy, Terry McNamara, following her record round at the LPGA Standard Register Ping tournament, March 16, 2001. She became the first woman to shoot 59 in an LPGA tournament.

enstam recalled that the crowd became almost eerily quiet during the last few holes. "It was like a pitcher with a no-hitter," said fellow LPGA golfer Meg Mallon. "Nobody said a word so they wouldn't mess it up for her." But when Sorenstam dropped her ball into the cup at the 18th hole to finish with a 59 score, the gallery erupted in cheers as she leaped into the arms of her caddy, Terry McNamara. "I'm absolutely overwhelmed," she said after completing her historic round. "I can't believe what I just did."

Another highlight of Sorenstam's 2001 season was a nationally televised exhibition match that pitted her and Tiger Woods against the team of Karrie Webb and David Duval, another top golfer from the men's pro tour. Webb and Duval narrowly won the event, which featured $1.7 million in prize money. Afterward, however, Sorenstam said she enjoyed the experience.

Sorenstam closed the 2001 season strongly as well. On August 19 she clinched the Canadian Women's Open by two strokes to claim her sixth victory of the season. The win gave her 14 top-ten finishes in 19 starts and boosted her money total for the season past the $1.5 million mark. "I'm overwhelmed with this season," she said afterward. "I'm really happy with my game and swing."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Sorenstam enjoys cooking and a wide range of outdoor activities. "I like to be home. I love to cook and do things I don't get to do on the road," she stated. "I like sports in general. If it's winter, I like to ski. Summer, play a little tennis or waterski." She also enjoys working on her computer.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Sorenstam married David Esch, a business consultant for a golf equipment maker, on January 4, 1997. Esch takes care of the business side of his wife's career. For example, he arranges her travel schedule and coordinates interviews, correspondence, and other details of her career. He notes that he sometimes gets strange reactions from other men when they hear that his wife is the primary moneymaker in their relationship. But he says that he enjoys working on behalf of his wife. "It's Annika's golf, after all, that has allowed us to explore the world together," he said. "It is Annika's golf that provides interesting, rewarding careers for us." The couple do not have any children, but Sorenstam says that she would like to start a family someday. She and her husband have homes in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, and Palm Desert, California.

WRITINGS

Dare to Be Best, 1996 (available only in Swedish)

HONORS AND AWARDS

NCAA Women's Individual Golf Champion: 1991
Co-Winner, College Player of the Year: 1991
NCAA All-American: 1991, 1992
PAC-10 Women's Individual Golf Champion: 1992
Women's World Amateur Golf Champion: 1992
WPG Rookie of the Year: 1993
Rolex LPGA Rookie of the Year: 1994
Athlete of the Year (Swedish Government): 1995
Rolex Player of the Year (LPGA): 1995, 1997, 1998
Vare Trophy (LPGA): 1995, 1996, 1998

FURTHER READING

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Athletes and Coaches of Summer, 2000
Who's Who in America, 2001

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WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.lpga.com/players/roster.cfm

Jackie Stiles 1978-

American Professional Basketball Player with the Portland Fire
Set an NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Career Scoring Record with 3,393 Points

BIRTH

Jackie Marie Stiles was born on December 21, 1978, in Kansas City, Kansas. Her father, Pat Stiles, is a high school teacher, coach, and athletic director. Her mother, Pam Stiles, is a homemaker. Jackie is the oldest of four surviving children in her family. She has two younger brothers, P.J. and Corey, and one younger sister, Roxanne. Another younger sister, Carlie,

was born with congenital encephalopathy, a condition in which the part of the brain that controls motor skills does not develop properly. Carlie died from the condition when she was nine months old.

YOUTH

Stiles grew up in Claflin, Kansas, a small farming town near the Ozark Mountains with a population of about 650. "There wasn't a lot to do," she said of her hometown. "There were no malls or anything, so you just played sports to have a good time."

"When [my father] showed me the fundamentals, I just soaked everything up. It wasn't like he had to force me to do anything. I wanted to do it. And all the time he was telling me, 'Jackie, gosh — go do something else.'"

Stiles began playing basketball at the age of five. Her father was the boys' basketball coach at Claflin High School at that time, and she often accompanied him to the gym. While the team practiced, Stiles would dribble a ball and work on her skills along the sidelines. "I'd show her a ball-handling drill that I'd use with my team, and she'd disappear," her father recalled. "I wouldn't see her again until she perfected it." Stiles soon developed a deep love for the game and began playing it during every spare minute. "When [my father] showed me the fundamentals, I just soaked everything up," she noted. "It wasn't like he had to force me to do anything. I wanted to do it. And all the time he was telling me, 'Jackie, gosh — go do something else.'"

When Stiles was 12 years old, her sister Carlie died in infancy. At this point, Stiles became determined to work hard and make the most of her athletic skills as a way of honoring her sister. "I set out to accomplish great things for her just because she didn't get the opportunity," she stated.

The following year, Stiles played in a league sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). Her performance there impressed Lynette Robinson, the coach of the women's basketball team at Southwest Missouri State University (SMS) in Springfield. Robinson sent Stiles a brochure about the basketball camps that were held at SMS, along with a note saying that she could play Division I college basketball if she continued to work hard. The coach made quite an impression on Stiles, who ended up

attending SMS camps for five years. "I was in awe," she remembered. "I didn't have any perspective on whether I could ever be good enough to get a scholarship or anything like that. So when this happened, that really made me focus in on wanting to play Division I college basketball."

Throughout her youth, Stiles pushed herself to excel. She would get up early to lift weights before school, attend basketball practice after school, go home for dinner, then return to the gym and shoot baskets by herself for hours at night. "On Saturday nights she'd be at the gym, and all of her friends were going to the movies and out to eat," her mother recalled. "She never did well with boyfriends. Her idea of a date was to hang out in the gym and have them rebound for her. And boys got kind of tired of that."

Throughout her youth, Stiles pushed herself to excel. "On Saturday nights she'd be at the gym, and all of her friends were going to the movies and out to eat," her mother recalled. "She never did well with boyfriends. Her idea of a date was to hang out in the gym and have them rebound for her. And boys got kind of tired of that."

EDUCATION

By the time Stiles entered Claflin Junior High School, she was already a basketball star. She averaged 30 points per game in junior high, and her team was undefeated during her time there. In 1993, Stiles became a freshman at Claflin High School, which had a total enrollment of 80 students. She averaged 29.9 points per game in her first year as a member of the girls' varsity basketball team. During her sophomore year at Claflin High, Stiles broke her right arm and missed four games. Within a few days of the injury, however, she had taught herself to shoot left-handed, and she still managed to average 26.4 points per game for the season. As she recovered from her injury, Stiles started a ritual of shooting after practice until she made 1,000 baskets. For a while, she did this every day, despite the fact that it took between three and four hours.

Stiles emerged into the national spotlight during her junior year. During the first game of the season, she scored 61 points in just 17 minutes. She went on to average 38.5 points per game for the season. Her outstanding statistics earned her Kansas Gatorade Player of the Year honors, as well as an invitation to play for the 1996 U.S. Basketball Junior National Team. Amazingly, Stiles only continued to improve during her senior year in high school. She raised her average to 46.4 points per game and set a state

record by scoring 71 points in a single game. She earned Kansas Player of the Year honors for a second time, and she was invited to play on the 1997 USA Junior World Championship team.

Stiles ended her career at Claflin High with 3,603 points to become the top scorer in Kansas history, male or female. She also posted 829 rebounds, 523 assists, and 326 steals. She was named first team all-state all four years, and first team all-American as a junior and senior. During Stiles's years at Claflin High, people came from miles around to see her play. In fact, her high school games were so popular that people started lining up outside the gym in the morning to get a seat for an afternoon game. Everyone in town had a team bumper sticker on their car, and the local newspaper ran a regular feature highlighting Stiles's statistics. Fans waited outside the gym for her autograph after games, and she received hundreds of letters from admirers.

> *Stiles agonized about what college to attend. "I didn't want to disappoint people. I've always tried to please everybody, tried to make everybody happy. . . . I was trying to please other people instead of just thinking what was best for me."*

In addition to her accomplishments on the basketball court, Stiles also starred for her school in track and tennis. She posted a career record of 81-12 in singles tennis and placed third in the state as a senior. Stiles also earned a total of 14 state track medals during her high school career, in the 400 meters, 800 meters, 1600 meters, 3200 meters, and triple jump. Finally, she played percussion in the school band and made the honor roll with a 3.4 grade point average. She graduated from Claflin High School in 1997.

Choosing a College

Fans were not the only ones who took notice of Stiles's athletic talent. College coaches regularly attended her high school basketball games. During her senior season, people began speculating about where Stiles would go to college. Many people thought she would choose to attend a women's basketball powerhouse, like the University of Connecticut (UConn). On the day that National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules allowed college coaches to contact recruits, Stiles's telephone began ringing a few minutes after midnight. Her family hosted 19 different recruiters during the 20 days of open recruiting.

Stiles (10), trailed by teammate Melody Campbell (30), leading a fast break for Southwest Missouri State, March 3, 2001.

Stiles made official visits to several schools, including Southwest Missouri State, Colorado, Kansas State, Oklahoma, and Connecticut. But she had a terrible time making a final decision. In fact, she agonized so much that she had trouble eating and sleeping. One day, she even stayed home from school and called a psychic hotline for advice. "I didn't want to disappoint people," she noted. "I've always tried to please everybody, tried to make everybody happy. . . . I was trying to please other people instead of just thinking what was best for me."

> *"Coming in here [to SMS] as a freshman, being from Claflin, Kansas, I was the type of player that had the ball in my hands all the time. I either created my own shot or I created a shot for someone else by penetrating and passing. When I got to the college game, it was so different because I had to learn to work without the ball in my hands—reading screens, setting screens, making good cuts—and I never had to do that."*

Finally, Stiles decided to follow her gut instinct and attend Southwest Missouri State. Some people, including her father, were upset about her decision. They worried that playing at a small school like SMS would not give her the national attention that she would have in a big-name program like UConn. But Stiles felt that she belonged at the school where she had attended basketball camp for so many summers. "I knew SMS was always in my heart, and that's why I really picked SMS," she explained. "I love my teammates, they're the greatest teammates ever. Plus, my coaches I know are going to make me the best basketball player I can possibly become."

One of the reasons Stiles wanted to play for SMS was the team's strong fan base. The Lady Bears boasted one of the highest average attendance figures of any women's college team. In fact, fans followed the team to away games across the country. The Lady Bears even attracted 200 fans for an exhibition game held in the U.S. Virgin Islands. With the support of their fans, the team averaged 24 victories per season under Coach Cheryl Burnett. "We have a great atmosphere in Springfield," Stiles said. "I mean, playing in front of a packed house every night, that's what you dream about as a kid."

The dedication of SMS fans almost caused a serious problem for Stiles. A short time before Stiles committed to play for the Lady Bears, a fan took

out a full-page advertisement in the *Great Bend Tribune* encouraging her to attend SMS. The ad appeared to violate NCAA regulations that prohibit colleges from using buttons, bumper stickers, advertisements, or other such methods to publicize their interest in a high-school athlete. The NCAA could have decided that the school used illegal means to influence Stiles's decision. That judgement would have made her ineligible to play for the Lady Bears. But after reviewing the case, the NCAA decided to allow Stiles to play since the ad was paid for by a private individual rather than the university.

Stiles attended Southwest Missouri State for four years, from 1997 to 2001. In addition to playing basketball for the SMS Lady Bears, she pursued a major in physical education. She left SMS without finishing her bachelor's degree, but she plans to continue taking classes in order to graduate in spring 2002. She eventually would like to coach or become a personal trainer. "My ideal job would be to train WNBA or professional basketball players in the off-season," she noted. "The thing about coaching is I don't know if I can sit there and watch it and have enough patience to keep from wanting to go out there and do it myself."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

College—The Southwest Missouri State Lady Bears

Stiles continued her basketball career at Southwest Missouri State. In her early days there, she maintained her intense training schedule. Although her teammates worked hard, they immediately recognized that Stiles was different. One time, when several members of the team talked her into joining them for dinner, she became upset when they did not return to campus immediately afterward because she had not yet completed her daily workout. Upon returning at midnight, she talked a security guard into letting her in the gym to shoot baskets. "If I miss a day, I'd feel guilty," she noted. "I'd never have that day again to get better and improve."

But the demands of the college season eventually caught up with Stiles, and she became tired toward the end of her freshman year. At this point, her coach forced her to take days off to rest. "It's really hard for me to go for a day and not touch a ball," she admitted. "If I'm exhausted, and we have a day off, I try to take it. I listen to my body more, and it's helped because I feel fresher in games. Coach Burnett has worked on me, but it's taken a long time because I feel confident if I work hard and shoot a lot. I'm trying to get a balance."

When she entered SMS, Stiles was a major scoring threat at shooting guard or point guard. She could penetrate off the dribble, pull up and hit

Stiles (10) of the Portland Fire beats Merlakia Jones (25) of the Cleveland Rockers on a drive to the basket, June 26, 2001.

an outside shot, and make her free throws when she drew a foul. But to succeed at the college level, she had to improve her defense and learn to move without the ball. "Coming in here as a freshman, being from Claflin, Kansas, I was the type of player that had the ball in my hands all the time. I either created my own shot or I created a shot for someone else by penetrating and passing," she stated. "When I got to the college game, it was so

different because I had to learn to work without the ball in my hands—reading screens, setting screens, making good cuts—and I never had to do that." During Stiles's freshman season in 1997-98, the Lady Bears went 24-6 and qualified for the NCAA championship tournament, but were knocked out in the first round.

A Stressful Situation

Both Stiles and the Lady Bears struggled at the beginning of her sophomore season. At one point, Coach Burnett even benched Stiles for not working hard enough on defense. Then Stiles's father told a reporter that he wanted his daughter to transfer to the University of Connecticut. Before long, rumors were flying around Springfield that she was leaving SMS. Stiles insisted that she planned to stay, but the whole incident was stressful for her and the team. "It was a rough time for me, for my teammates, and for the coaching staff. Let's just say I'm glad it's behind us," she noted. "We had team meetings and talked it through. In the end, I would say it made us rethink our goals and brought us closer together."

Once the controversy ended, the Lady Bears won 15 straight games. They finished the season with a 25-7 record and once again qualified for the NCAA tournament, though they lost in the second round. Stiles posted the second-best scoring average in the nation with 25.7 points per game. After the season, she emphasized her commitment to the Lady Bears. "Looking back and being more mature, I believe [attending SMS] was the best decision of my life, and I wouldn't trade this journey for anything," she stated. "I can see all the steps Coach Burnett was taking me through, challenging me to bring out the best in me as a player. She's got to be one of the best coaches in the country for what she's done for my game and for this team."

During her junior year, Stiles broke her school's all-time career scoring record of 1,944 points, held by her idol and friend Melody Howard. As she approached the record, the pressure started to affect her play. "I was playing really tight in that game [when I broke the record]," she said. "I didn't know for sure how many points I needed, but I knew I was pretty close to it. Then, once I broke it, I knew how much pressure I had been feeling because I felt light as a feather, just really relaxed."

The Lady Bears posted a 23-9 record in 1999-2000, and Stiles led the nation in scoring as a junior with an average of 27.8 points per game. But she was deeply disappointed that her team lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament again. "I would much rather play in the Final Four than get any of these records that I've ever gotten," she stated. "I had some of that

individual success in high school, and I've never been satisfied. It just devastated me not winning a state championship, so my whole purpose my senior year is just to win games and, hopefully, win championships. You couldn't ask for anything more."

Setting the NCAA Career Scoring Record

Before the start of Stiles's senior season, Lady Bears fans talked about whether the star player would break the NCAA record for points scored in a career. The official record of 3,122 was held by Patricia Hoskins, who set it playing for Mississippi Valley in 1989. But some people claimed that the true collegiate scoring title belonged to Lynette Woodard, who scored 3,649 points during her career at Kansas. Woodard's record was not recognized by the NCAA because it was set in 1981, when women's basketball was governed by the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) rather than the NCAA. "She was an incredible player," Stiles said of Woodard. "I remember when I was young, I went to watch her play with the Harlem Globetrotters and it was amazing the things she did on the basketball floor. Even if the NCAA doesn't record her points, I think people will always know what she did."

As her senior season progressed, Stiles averaged 30.3 points per game. Fans and the media followed her scoring carefully and tried to predict when she would break the NCAA record. But Stiles avoided reading the papers or watching TV and warned her friends and teammates not to talk about it. She remembered how the pressure of breaking the Lady Bears career scoring title had affected her play, and she was determined to focus on her goals of winning the Missouri Valley Conference and doing well in the NCAA tournament. As the season went on, Stiles passed great players like Chamique Holdsclaw and Cheryl Miller on the all-time scoring list. She finally broke the record during a home game against Creighton on March 1, 2001, and finished the season with a total of 3,393 points. "When I sit back and think about where I am now, I can't believe this is me," she noted. "It all happened so fast, the whole journey."

Leading Her Team to the Final Four

As the Lady Bears entered post-season play at the end of the 2000-01 season, Stiles was on fire. During a game against Drake for the Missouri Valley tournament title, she scored 47 points, including a burst of 17 points in five minutes. Her outstanding play continued in the NCAA tournament, which the Lady Bears entered as a fifth seed. In the first round against Toledo, she was forced to leave the game with a slight concussion. But her

teammates increased their level of play and won the game anyway. In the second round, SMS faced Rutgers, which boasted the toughest defense in the nation. But Stiles was unstoppable, scoring 32 points to lead her team to victory. Then the Lady Bears faced Duke, the top-seeded team in the west region. The winner would advance to the quarterfinal round of the tournament, commonly known as the Elite Eight. Stiles scored 41 points against Duke to lift SMS to victory.

Before this time, few people outside of the Midwest had seen Stiles play. Some had heard about her setting a new NCAA scoring record, but they figured that she had achieved this landmark against weak competition. But when SMS upset Duke, basketball fans across the country started paying attention. Everyone wanted to know about the high-scoring guard who was leading the underdog Lady Bears in their charge through the NCAA tournament. Stiles gained many new fans as she signed autographs, gave interviews, and refused to take credit for her team's success. "Coach Burnett has done a great job of developing me as a basketball player," she stated. "My teammates have done a great job of giving up themselves to set screens, to get me into scoring position, because I have seen so many defenses that I have to rely heavily on them."

> ***"I would much rather play in the Final Four than get any of these records that I've ever gotten. I had some of that individual success in high school, and I've never been satisfied. It just devastated me not winning a state championship, so my whole purpose my senior year is just to win games and, hopefully, win championships. You couldn't ask for anything more."***

The Lady Bears beat Washington to advance to the semifinals of the NCAA tournament, known as the Final Four. The last rounds of the tournament were held in St. Louis, Missouri, which was practically a home game for SMS. Stiles and her teammates faced Purdue for the right to play in the championship game. Unfortunately, the Lady Bears' outstanding season ended at this point. Stiles scored 22 points, but Purdue's team was just too big and strong for SMS to handle defensively. They lost their Final Four matchup by a score of 81-64. "They did a great job defensively," Stiles said of Purdue. "They made me work so hard in the first half that in the second half I just ran out of gas at the end." Although the Lady Bears had a fine season and posted a 29-5 record, Stiles was disappointed at her failure to win a championship.

Thanks to her impressive performance in the NCAA tournament, Stiles won the 2001 Margaret Wade Trophy as the nation's top female basketball player. A few months later, she was awarded the Honda-Broderick Cup as the best female collegiate athlete of the year. Stiles left SMS in spring 2001 without finishing her degree in physical education.

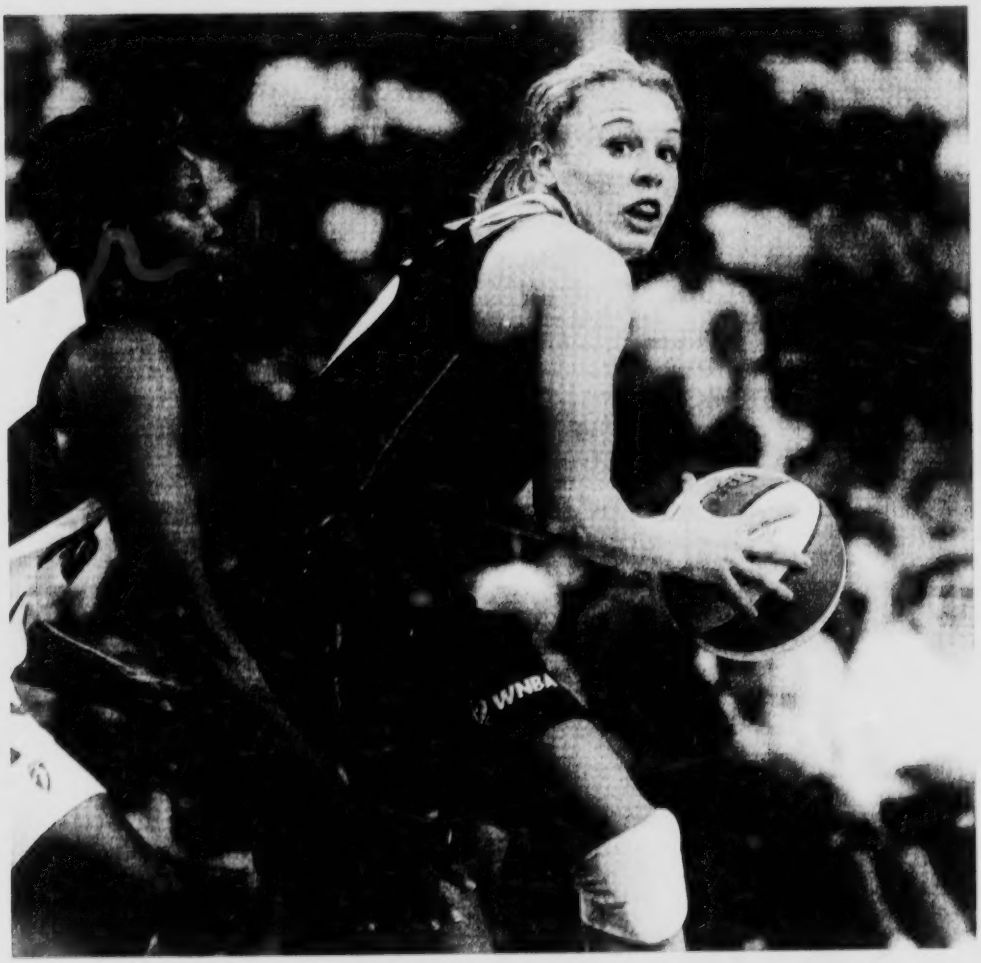
WNBA—The Portland Fire

After leaving SMS, Stiles hoped to begin a career in professional basketball. She became just the sixth woman ever to be drafted by a men's professional team when she was selected as the 19th player overall by the Dodge City Legend of the United States Basketball League. But few people actually expected Stiles to join a men's league. Her selection by the Legend was mostly a way of honoring her accomplishments and attracting attention to the team.

"Stiles was thrilled to be drafted by the Fire. She could not believe that she would be paid for playing the game she loved. "It's just an amazing opportunity . . . to be playing professional basketball. I've got to say that again—professional basketball. I mean, that's just crazy."

Stiles was also drafted by the Portland Fire of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). She was selected with the fourth overall pick in the WNBA draft. The Fire was a new team that was created when the league expanded in 2000. They finished their first season with a 10-22 record, in seventh place out of eight teams in the western conference. Even though the team had struggled during its first year, Stiles was thrilled to be drafted by the Fire. She could not believe that she would be paid for playing the game she loved. "It's just an amazing opportunity . . . to be playing professional basketball," she stated. "I've got to say that again—professional basketball. I mean, that's just crazy."

Stiles knew that the competition would be intense at the professional level—particularly because at 5 feet, 8 inches, she is significantly shorter than many of the league's top players. "I know the transition to the WNBA is going to be very tough. I don't expect to do what I did in college my senior year. I want to work as hard as I can every day and do what Coach [Linda] Hargrove wants me to do and help the team win basketball games," she noted. "The athleticism and size that the league has is so in-



Stiles (right) looking to pass around Edna Campbell of the Sacramento Monarchs, July 27, 2001.

credible. I'm going to rely on my experience and try to make the adjustments I need when I get there." Stiles also faced a difficult transition on a personal level. After all, she was moving to a large, unfamiliar city, where she would be living by herself for the first time.

Not surprisingly, Stiles started off slowly with the Fire. She started in the first exhibition game and made the season's first basket for her team, but those were her only points as she was hampered by a pulled hamstring muscle. In the first home exhibition game, she scored nine points and hit a last-second shot to give her team the victory. As the season went on, Stiles grew more comfortable with WNBA competition and became a solid contributor on the court. She was even named WNBA player of the week for the week of July 2, and was selected as a reserve for the All-Star Game.

But the team faltered in the second half of the season, including a 10-game losing streak. Injuries contributed to the team's late-season problems, including tendinitis and a pulled groin muscle for Stiles. Ultimately, the Fire finished the season with a record of 11-21. That placed them seventh in the Western Conference, which knocked them out of playoff contention. Stiles finished the season with a shooting average of 14.9 points per game, ranked ninth in the league. By then she was already looking ahead to next year, trying to figure out how the Fire can make it to the next level. "One thing that will help us is gaining experience," she said. "I know that I learned a lot about the WNBA and how to be successful in the league. I'm going to work hard in the off-season and improve on my game, but you can't teach or coach experience. We could have been a playoff team, we kind of hit the wall and lost our focus and lost some games we should have won. We lost our confidence and it snowballed on us."

"I call her 'the young Jackie Stiles' because five years from now, she'll be so different," said her Portland teammate Vanessa Nygaard. "Right now, she is incredibly naive. She's like the boy in the bubble who suddenly got out of the bubble. You can't not like her. And you can't help but cheer for her."

Still, the season ended on a high note for Stiles. In August 2001, she was selected as the WNBA Rookie of the Year. She accepted the award with humility. "I was in a state of shock when they named me as Rookie of the Year," she said. "It was such an honor to accept that award. There are so many great players in the rookie class that deserve it just as much or more."

The Keys to Success

By the end of her first season in Portland, Stiles had endeared herself to her teammates and to fans. She was unfailingly considerate, willing to talk to fans and sign autographs for hours. She was humble and gracious, quick to credit her teammates and her coaches for her success. And her intense work ethic was praised by many. "She has a wide following, not just Missouri, Kansas, Midwest fans," said Coach Hargrove. "A lot of people like this throwback, this small-town kid who has gotten where she's gotten because of her work ethic. It buys into what a lot of people think sports should be about." Stiles seemed awed by much about her new life. She signed an endorsement deal with Nike, which also gave her 45

Stiles holding her trophy after she was named WNBA rookie of the year, August 16, 2001.

minutes to pick out anything she wanted from the company store. Most people would be frantically piling goodies in their cart. But after 20 minutes, Stiles had just selected one pair of shoes and one pair of socks. Nike employees started dumping merchandise on her. "I was overwhelmed—I don't know how to spend that kind of money," she said. "I'm used to buying one pair of shoes that matches everything." Clearly, the money was new to her. In fact, as soon as she signed her contract with the WNBA, she used her first paycheck to get braces for her teeth. "I call her 'the young Jackie Stiles' because five years from now, she'll be so different," said her Portland teammate Vanessa Nygaard. "Right now, she is incredibly naive. She's like the boy in the bubble who suddenly got out of the bubble. You can't not like her. And you can't help but cheer for her."

According to Stiles, talent and hard work alone do not account for her phenomenal success on the basketball court. She is very superstitious and relies on a number of pre-game rituals to guarantee victory for her team. "I do the same thing from the morning of the game to the night of the game every single time," she admitted. "I don't know why I get like that, but I've always been like that throughout my career. If we start losing, I'll change my routine. . . . I always wear the same things with my uniform, my same socks, same hair thing. I chew the same kind of gum." She also eats the same food, takes a nap for exactly 45 minutes, and watches the same videotapes of former Boston Celtic star Larry Bird before each game.

Stiles eventually hopes to play basketball for the United States in the Olympic Games, possibly in 2004. She took a step toward that goal in 2000, when she was one of 12 top women players named to the Jones Cup team, which plays an international Olympic qualifying schedule. "I don't know what it is about the game of basketball, but I definitely love it," she stated. "People thought, with all the time I have spent on basketball, that I would get burned out. But it's not work, it's something I love to do."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Stiles is engaged to marry Matt Barrett, a Kansas middle school teacher and girls' basketball coach. The couple met when they both were working at a youth basketball camp. They dated for two years before Barrett proposed in front of 600 SMS fans at a Lady Bears banquet in October 2000. "I was a little embarrassed having that happen in front of so many people," Stiles remembered. "But when you think about it, there couldn't be a more fitting place to have it happen, to share that moment with all these people who have been so supportive." As of summer 2001, they had not yet settled on a wedding date.

> *"I don't know what it is about the game of basketball, but I definitely love it. People thought, with all the time I have spent on basketball, that I would get burned out. But it's not work, it's something I love to do."*

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When she is not training or playing basketball, Stiles likes to relax by playing board games and watching videos. Although she has little time for a social life, she enjoys dressing up and is always concerned about her appearance. In fact, her college roommate, Carly Deer, describes her as "very girly with her hair and makeup." Another SMS teammate, Tara Mitchem, remembers an incident when Stiles refused to leave her dorm room without doing her hair and putting on makeup: "It's three in the morning and the tornado sirens go off and we're in the dorms and she turns the curling iron on to curl her bangs before we go down to the basement."

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

Missouri Valley Conference Player of the Year: 1999, 2000, 2001
U.S. Basketball Writers Association First Team All-American: 2000, 2001
Associated Press First Team All-American: 2001
Kodak First Team All-American: 2001
Verizon First Team Academic All-American: 2001
NCAA Tournament West Region MVP: 2001
NCAA Women's Career Scoring Record: 2001, 3,393 points
Margaret Wade Trophy: 2001, for the nation's top female basketball player

Honda-Broderick Cup: 2001, for the best female collegiate athlete of the year
WNBA Rookie of the Year: 2001

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WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.wnba.com
http://www.webkrafts.com/stiles

UPDATE

Tiger Woods 1975-

American Professional Golfer
Winner of Four Consecutive Major Events on the PGA Tour

[Editor's Note: In 1996, Biography Today *featured Eldrick "Tiger" Woods in* Biography Today Sports Series, *its first special volume devoted solely to athletes of interest to young readers. At that time, Woods had just decided to leave Stanford University, give up his*

amateur status, and become a professional golfer. Since then, his spectacular success on the PGA Tour has made him one of the most successful and popular athletes in all of sports. With this in mind, the editors of Biography Today *decided to provide readers with an update summarizing Woods's accomplishments since joining the PGA Tour. For information on his childhood and his experiences as an amateur golfer, please see our original profile in* Biography Today Sports Series, Volume One.]

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Making a Big Splash in the Pros

When Tiger Woods first joined the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) Tour in 1996, golf experts agreed that he was a promising young talent who had the potential to win several major championships over the course of his career. Over the previous two years, after all, he had carted home nearly every major collegiate and amateur golfing award available. Nonetheless, Woods's performance during his first months on the tour took many people by surprise. Less than three months after turning pro, Woods won his first PGA tournament. This victory, at the 1996 Las Vegas Invitational, came in only his fifth start as a professional. His early success did not surprise his fellow golfers. "We all knew he was going to win some time," said PGA pro Davis Love III. "I just didn't want it to be today." Two weeks later, the young star golfed his way to victory at the Walt Disney Classic. These impressive performances helped Woods garner PGA Rookie of the Year honors at the conclusion of the 1996 campaign.

> ***"I've always dreamed of playing the Masters and winning it. Everyone who is a little kid dreams of playing in the Masters and winning."***

In 1997 Woods claimed four more titles, including the prestigious Masters Tournament in April at Augusta, Georgia. The victory at Augusta was his first "Grand Slam" championship. (The PGA has four major tournaments known as "Grand Slam" events—the Masters, the U.S. Open, the British Open, and the PGA Championship. These are the four most renowned events on the PGA tour.) His triumph at the Masters also showed for the first time that he was capable of dominating a tournament. Woods won the 1997 Masters by 12 strokes, a record margin for that tournament and the greatest victory margin for any major professional golf tournament since

1862. In fact, he set 20 new tournament records, including best overall score (270), and tied six others during the course of the four-day event. When he tapped in his last putt of the tournament, the crowd roared in approval as Woods rushed over to his father and gave him a tearful hug. "I've always dreamed of playing the Masters and winning it," he later said. "Everyone who is a little kid dreams of playing in the Masters and winning."

Woods's amazing run at the Masters added to his growing fame. Numerous companies asked him to endorse their products, and crowds followed him whenever he ventured out in public. Several major sports awards came his way as well, including ESPN's Male Athlete of the Year and PGA Player of the Year. He was even named one of *Time* magazine's 25 most influential Americans in 1997. He made the list because it was clear that as a player of mixed-race heritage, he was having a tremendous impact on a sport that had always been dominated by white players.

> ***"People assume that since I've been in the spotlight for a while that I know how to handle all this," he admitted in 1998. "But I just finished my first full year on the Tour, and I'm still learning."***

For the most part, Woods enjoyed the attention and all the talk about his status as golf's next superstar. But he also discovered that being a celebrity is not always pleasant. Woods was stung when some of his fellow golfers publicly complained that he was a little too cocky. He also learned that he needed to choose his words carefully when talking with journalists. For example, in the spring of 1997, *GQ* magazine published an interview with Woods that quoted him telling jokes that made fun of gays and people from different ethnic backgrounds. To many people, the article simply showed that the young star still had a streak of immaturity in him. But other readers felt that his remarks made him sound like an insensitive jerk, especially since he himself had sometimes been the target of bigoted attitudes and remarks during his youth and in the first years of his golfing career. The controversy over the article eventually died down without causing any lasting damage to his reputation. Nonetheless, his friends and family believe that the incident taught him a valuable lesson about behaving professionally at all times.

The 1998 campaign was Woods's least successful year on the PGA tour. He posted top ten finishes in 12 different events, but he won only one PGA tournament—the BellSouth Classic in Georgia—the entire year. By the

Woods with his mother, Kultida (left), and his father, Earl (right).

end of the year, some golf fans wondered if he might have been a one-season wonder on the PGA tour. But fellow players and golf experts knew that Woods spent much of the 1998 season adjusting various parts of his game, from his putting grip to his swing on tee shots. They also knew that the young star was still learning how to handle the constant attention from fans and media. "People assume that since I've been in the spotlight for a while that I know how to handle all this," he admitted at the time. "But I just finished my first full year on the Tour, and I'm still learning." These challenges took up a lot of Woods's time and energy. But most members of the PGA tour expected Tiger to roar again before too much time passed.

Tiger Rises to the Top

Just as predicted, Woods returned to championship form the following season. Putting his forgettable 1998 season behind him, he marched to the top of the golfing world in 1999. Woods won seven of the 22 PGA events in which he played, and he finished in the top ten in nine other tournaments. His string of top-notch performances in 1999 brought him more than $6.6 million in tournament winnings for the year, best on the entire tour. The highlight of his great 1999 campaign was his one-stroke victory

at the PGA Championship in Medinah, Illinois. In that event, he outdueled Sergio Garcia, another rising star of the golf world. The victory in Medinah gave Woods the second major championship of his career.

As the 1999 PGA season drew to a close, sports fans all around the world expressed appreciation for Woods's skill, competitive drive, and cool nerves. But even though observers agreed that he was the finest player to join the tour in many years, almost no one was prepared for his incredible performance during the 2000 season.

A Spectacular Season

As the 2000 campaign progressed, Woods dominated the PGA Tour like no other player ever had before. He won more than half of the PGA events in which he competed, claiming nine victories in 17 tournaments. At one point, he won six consecutive PGA events. This brilliant streak led some of his fellow golfers to admit that when Tiger was playing at his best, everyone else was reduced to battling for second place.

Woods also shone in the year's premier events. After finishing fifth in the 2000 Masters Championship (Vijay Singh won the event), the young superstar won all of the year's remaining Grand Slam events—the U.S. Open, the British Open, and the PGA Championship. In each of these tournaments, Woods displayed his usual blend of skill, focus, and determination. He won the 2000 U.S. Open in Pebble Beach, California, by a mind-boggling 15 strokes, breaking or tying eight different tournament records in the process. After the event was over, second-place finisher Ernie Els admitted that "I could have played out of my mind and still lost by six or seven [strokes]."

A few weeks later, Woods won the 2000 British Open at St. Andrews, Scotland, where golf was first invented. His score for the tournament was 19 under par, a new record for the event. This victory made Woods the youngest player in history to win all four Grand Slams over the course of a career (the only other players with "career" Grand Slams are Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Gene Sarazen, and Gary Player). Around this time, *Sports Illustrated* spoke for many when it stated that "if the goal is to beat the entire golf world into submission, Woods is practically there. In the last two years he has refined his game, and now he is the world's best driver of the ball, its best iron player, best chipper, and best putter."

Woods entered the PGA Championship—the last Grand Slam event of the 2000 season—as the heavy favorite to win. But this time, the young superstar did not coast to victory. Instead, he narrowly won the champi-

onship by defeating Bob May by one stroke in a tense and dramatic playoff. "It was a memorable battle today, and I enjoyed it," Woods said afterward. "Birdie for birdie, shot for shot, we were going right at each other." His triumph in the PGA Championship made him the first player to win back-to-back PGA championships since 1937. In addition, his win established him as the first player in almost 50 years to win three of the PGA's four major events in the same year. But Woods indicated that he still had plenty of other goals that would keep him hungry for years to come. "I feel very fortunate about being able to win as many tournaments as I've won, but there are a lot of things I haven't achieved yet," he said.

"Before he turned pro in 1996, the PGA Tour was without a true athletic superstar," noted **Golf World** *in November 2000. "Its demographics were confined largely to white males, its television ratings more likely to resemble those of bowling than basketball. Woods changed all that. Not only did he capture the career Grand Slam in less than four years, he has endeared himself to the masses as a man who competes at golf as if it were a contact sport. He has transported the game beyond its racial boundaries, won more tournaments (24) than any active player, and dramatically altered America's golf sensibilities."*

Growing Fame and Fortune

Woods's spectacular 2000 season made him a very wealthy young man. He earned $8.49 million on the golf course by the time the season was over, about $5 million more than any other player on the tour. These winnings lifted him to the top of the PGA's all-time career earnings list, with $19.8 million. In addition, it is estimated that Woods earns another $30 million or so every year by endorsing golfing gear (like Nike golf balls and sports clothing) and consumer products (like the Wheaties breakfast cereal).

Many people believe that no one deserves such riches for endorsing products. But television and advertising executives believe that Woods's phenomenal popularity among people of all ages and ethnic groups make him a very effective spokesman. "Before he turned pro in 1996, the PGA Tour was without a true athletic superstar," noted *Golf World* in November 2000. "Its demographics [audi-

ence] were confined largely to white males, its television ratings more likely to resemble those of bowling than basketball. Woods changed all that. Not only did he capture the career Grand Slam in less than four years, he has endeared himself to the masses as a man who competes at golf as if it were a contact sport. He has transported the game beyond its racial boundaries, won more tournaments (24) than any active player, and dramatically altered America's golf sensibilities."

"Perfection is always elusive in golf. But that doesn't mean you can't strive to be the best you can be. To improve, you have to pay your dues on the practice tee and around the green. That means putting in extra time and effort to develop your skills. Nothing is ever given to you. You have to earn it."

Indeed, Woods has carried professional golf to new heights of popularity. Television executives estimate that tournaments in which Woods plays draw twice the TV audience of tournaments in which he does not participate. "Tiger's popularity and impact on ratings have been so profound that, at times, he overshadows the tournaments in which he is playing," noted Mark Hyman in *Business Week*. It has also forced PGA officials to give Woods special attention. When he complained in the fall of 2000 that the PGA Tour was misusing his image in advertising and not treating him with respect, officials quickly acted to satisfy the young star.

Woods has also set aside some of his earnings for charitable works. For example, he used half a million dollars to establish the Tiger Woods Foundation in 1997. The organization holds several golf clinics each year for underprivileged and minority children. Woods often provides personal attention to young golfers at these clinics. In addition, the foundation provides aid to other youth groups that work with inner-city kids. "By reaching out to kids in previously ignored inner-city locations, the Tiger Woods Foundation continues to change the face of golf to include more minorities and young people," stated Woods. "I am more proud of my involvement with the Tiger Woods Foundation than any tournament I've ever won. Through the game of golf, we're able to spread the good word about sportsmanship, family relationships, education, and solid values—building blocks that will make our world a better place."

Woods hitting out of a sand trap at the PGA Championship, August 19, 2001.

The "Tiger Slam"

When the 2001 PGA season got underway, Woods struggled to recapture the magic of the previous season. He did not win any of his first six tournaments, and he actually blew a big lead in one of those events (the Dubai Desert Classic). But in late March he won the Bay Hill Invitational by displaying an impressive blend of booming tee shots, skillful chip shots, and steady putting. This victory showed everyone that he was ready for the 2001 Masters Championship, scheduled to begin two weeks later.

As the Masters tournament approached, Woods became the focus of even more media attention. All of the sports world knew that if the young star could win the 2001 Masters, then he would be the first golfer ever to hold all four Grand Slam titles at the same time. As a result, huge galleries of fans and reporters trailed him all around the golf course throughout the tournament. But if all the fuss bothered Tiger, he did not let it show on the golf course. During the first two days of the four-day tournament, he posted scores that put him in the hunt for the title. On day three, Woods took the lead. But a number of other top golfers were within a stroke or two of the lead, so he knew that he would have to play well on the final day to claim victory.

"This is the greatest thing I've ever accomplished," he said after his victory in the 2001 Masters, when he became the reigning champion of all four PGA Grand Slam events. "You don't think about winning four majors in a row when you're a kid. All I ever dreamed about was competing against the best players and hopefully winning some majors. But four in a row? Yeah, I'm a little amazed."

On the final day of the tournament, Woods stood tall. He turned back challenges from Phil Mickelson and David Duval to win the 2001 Masters by two strokes. After clinching the title with an 18-foot birdie on the last hole, Woods could barely describe his feelings about being the reigning champion of all four PGA Grand Slam events. "This is the greatest thing I've ever accomplished," he said after his victory. "You don't think about winning four majors in a row when you're a kid. All I ever dreamed about was competing against the best players and hopefully winning some majors. But four in a row? Yeah, I'm a little amazed."

After the conclusion of the 2001 Masters, fans, sportswriters, and golfers all debated whether Woods's amazing streak was a true Grand Slam. After all, the modern-era Grand Slam refers to winning all four major PGA events in the same calendar year. Woods did not do that, but he did hold all four titles at the same time. With this in mind, his spectacular accomplishment became widely known as a "Tiger Slam."

In the days after Woods put himself in the history books with his "Tiger Slam," some observers predicted that he would dominate the rest of the 2001 season. After all, by the spring of 2001, he had won 27 of the 99 tour-

naments in which he played as a professional. Even more impressively, he had won an incredible 40 percent of the tournaments in which he played since 1999, posting 20 victories in 50 starts. "I've played with just about everybody, and I think I can say now that Tiger has hit virtually every truly great shot I've ever seen," admitted David Feherty, a former pro golfer and television commentator. "As we speak, he is deleting some of my greatest memories and replacing them with his. He simply does things other golfers can't do."

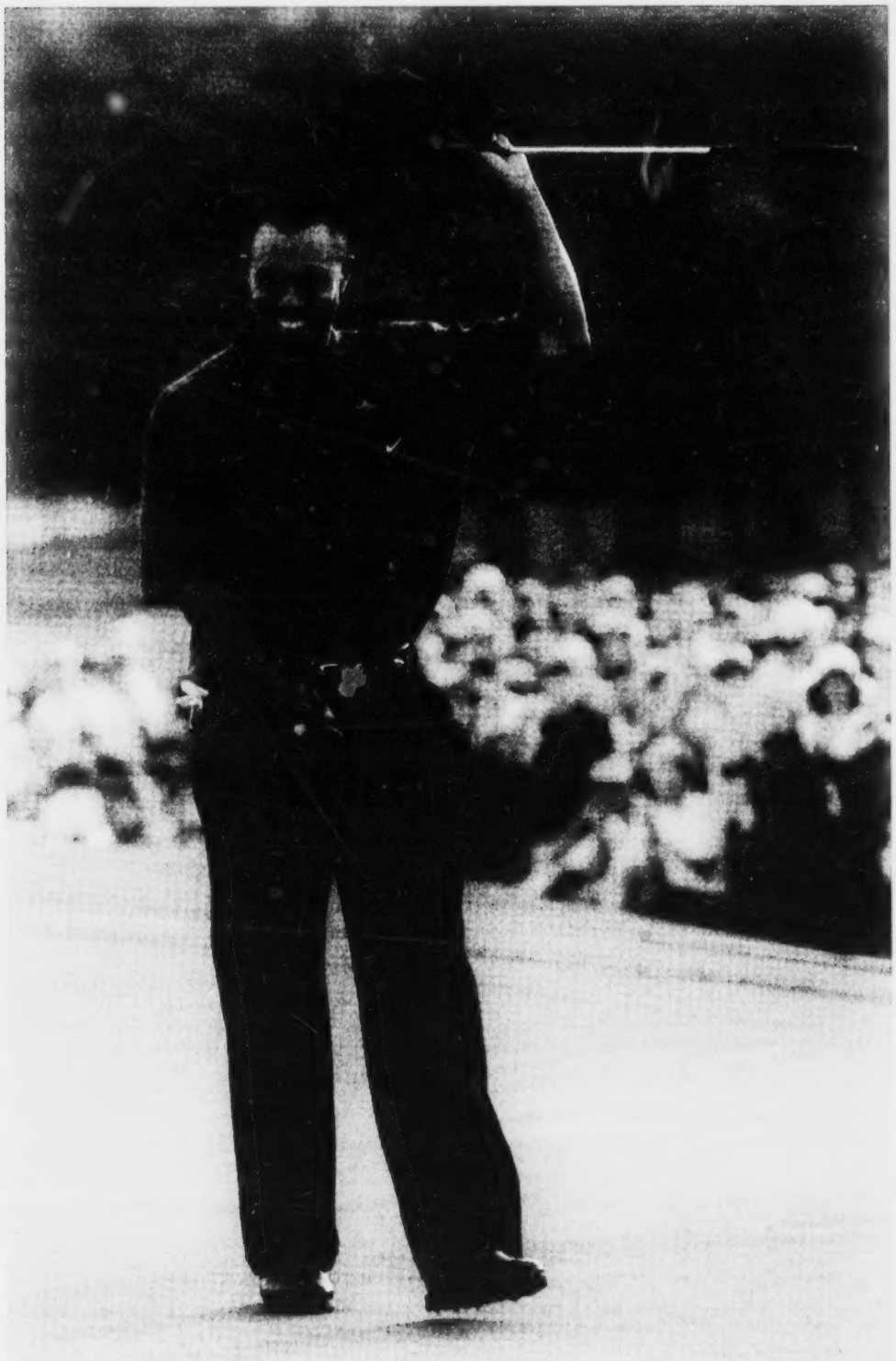
A Drive for Greatness

But after winning the Masters, Woods showed that even the world's finest player can fall into a slump. He struggled in many tournaments during the summer of 2001 and failed to make a serious bid for another Grand Slam title. One bright spot during this slump came at the NEC Invitational, where he and Jim Furyk battled their way through 25 holes. Woods eventually won in a dramatic seven-hole sudden death playoff. "Today was a lot of fun for me to be involved in, win or lose," he said at the time. "It was just fun to compete like that, where you are tested to the absolute utmost."

During the 2001 season, Woods often expressed frustration and unhappiness with his performance. But he remained confident that he would be able to regain his tournament-winning form before too much time passes. This belief is shared by many other people who know the young star's fierce desire and strong practice habits. "He is driven to be the best golfer who ever played," said PGA star-turned-announcer Johnny Miller.

Indeed, Woods is known throughout the golfing world for his legendary intensity and discipline. He devotes long hours to practice, and he always seems to be out on the golf course working on one phase of his game or another. Woods also displays his competitive focus during nationally televised tournaments. As David Owen wrote in the *New Yorker*, "He can be a dazzlingly emotional and telegenic performer, and he surely finds it thrilling to walk down fairways lined with thousands of deliriously happy admirers shouting his name, but he conveys the impression that he would play every bit as hard if the cameras and the microphones and the galleries simply disappeared."

For his part, Woods states that he is simply trying to get the most out of his abilities. "Perfection is always elusive in golf," he said. "But that doesn't mean you can't strive to be the best you can be. To improve, you have to pay your dues on the practice tee and around the green. That means



Woods celebrating his win of the Masters tournament on the 18th green of the Augusta National Golf Club, April 8, 2001.

putting in extra time and effort to develop your skills. Nothing is ever given to you. You have to earn it."

Activities Off the Golf Course

When Woods is not on the golf course, he enjoys fly-fishing and playing video games. He is also a big basketball fan, and is often seen courtside at Los Angeles Lakers home games.

Woods is not close friends with many other players on the tour, although he has a strong friendship with fellow golfer Mark O'Meara. But other players admire his skills and respect the way he has handled his fame and wealth. "He is a tremendously well-balanced young man," said golfing legend Gary Player. "He is a gracious loser. He dresses well. He speaks well. He will be a great influence on generations of people throughout the world."

Woods does have a number of friends with whom he enjoys spending time, however. These friends range from celebrity athletes like Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley to old pals from high school and college. In fact, Woods has been known to fly old friends halfway around the world to join him at golf tournaments.

> *As David Owen wrote in the* New Yorker, *"He can be a dazzlingly emotional and telegenic performer, and he surely finds it thrilling to walk down fairways lined with thousands of deliriously happy admirers shouting his name, but he conveys the impression that he would play every bit as hard if the cameras and the microphones and the galleries simply disappeared."*

Finally, Woods remains very close to his father, Earl Woods, and his mother, Kultida Woods. In the late 1990s his parents began living apart from one another. But they have made it clear that they remain united in their love and affection for their son. "Tiger has a mother and father who love him dearly, and who have always supported him and always will," said Earl Woods. "He is the top priority in the family."

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NCAA All-American, First Team: 1995, 1996
NCAA Championship Tournament: 1996, first place
Jack Nicklaus Award: 1996, male collegiate golfer of the year
Arete Award for Courage in Sports: 1996
Al Master Award (Stanford University): 1996, most outstanding athlete (co-winner)
Pac-10 Golfer of the Year: 1996
Rolex College Player of the Year: 1996
Sportsman of the Year (*Sports Illustrated*): 1996, 2000
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Vardon Trophy: 1999
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WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.tigerwoods.com (official Tiger Woods site)
http://www.clubtiger.com (official Tiger Woods fan club site)
http://www.pga.com

Aliy Zirkle 1969-

American Sled Dog Racer, Breeder, and Trainer
First Woman to Win Alaska's Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race

BIRTH

Alison Zirkle was born on December 20, 1969, in Manchester, New Hampshire. Her family and friends called her "Ali" (pronounced AL-ee) for short. At the age of eight, she added a "y" to the end of her nickname because she liked the way it looked. Her father, Doug, ran a shoe manufacturing company.

Her mother, Mickey, was trained as a zoologist and later worked as an administrator for the YMCA. Aliy has an older sister, Kaz.

YOUTH

When Zirkle was young, her father's job took the family to Puerto Rico. She and her sister spent much of their childhood living on this Caribbean island. Their father, who had played football and lacrosse at Cornell University, encouraged them to participate in sports. Aliy and Kaz ended up becoming a force on the soccer field, where they were known as "The Zirkle Wall." "Those poor Puerto Rican boys," Doug Zirkle remembered. "When they got sandwiched between those two in their soccer games. . . ."

Mickey Zirkle, the zoologist, passed along her love for animals to her daughters. The family kept numerous pets—as many as 19 at one time—including dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters, and horses. "Cleaning up poop has been my life," Aliy noted. "I don't think I'll ever get away from it." It was during her childhood that Zirkle first learned to enjoy being pulled around by dogs. "I used to have a little dog that pulled me around on a skateboard," she recalled. "That was my start in mushing. I didn't know what it was then. We would cruise right around. The wipeouts were much more painful [than falling off a dog sled in the snow]."

Zirkle first learned to enjoy being pulled around by dogs during her childhood. "I used to have a little dog that pulled me around on a skateboard. That was my start in mushing. I didn't know what it was then. We would cruise right around. The wipeouts were much more painful [than falling off a dog sled in the snow]."

Aliy and Kaz showed a great deal of confidence in themselves from a young age. "They've been strong-willed, self-motivated and driven individuals their whole lives," their father said. "They've always been competitive—athletically as well as academically. They've always had a reasonably good group of friends around them, but they're both capable of going out on their own." Aliy, in particular, was not afraid to be different and go against people's expectations. Luckily, her parents supported this independent streak. "I remember one Halloween when she said she wanted to be a king," her mother recalled. "Her grandmother was there and she said, 'No, you have to be a queen or a princess.' Aliy said, 'No, I want to be a king.' I told her, 'Of course, you can be whatever you want to be."

EDUCATION

Zirkle attended elementary and middle school in Puerto Rico. When she was a teenager, her family returned to the United States and settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where she attended Parkway West High School. "I liked that school," she noted. "I had some pretty nifty, out-there teachers." Zirkle was a good student and played on the school's volleyball and basketball teams. Upon graduating from high school in 1988, she decided to attend the University of Pennsylvania (commonly called Penn).

At Penn, Zirkle studied biology. She also played volleyball and participated in track and field. Her main track and field event was the hammer throw. She set a school record in the event with a throw of 161 feet. She even tried out for the U.S. Olympic team in the hammer throw, but she barely missed the qualifying distance.

In 1990, Zirkle took a year off from college in order to travel. She ended up in Alaska, where she spent six months counting birds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. When this seasonal job ended, she took a similar position in Australia. Zirkle then returned to Penn, where she earned her bachelor's degree in behavioral biology in 1992.

"

"I decided my first winter [in Alaska] that I should travel, in order to avoid any hint of cabin fever. So, several of the locals convinced me to buy a snowmachine. I did explore much of the Brooks Range and the foothills to the south that winter. However, come spring my back hurt and I had a constant ringing in my ears."

"

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Moving to Alaska and Taking Up Mushing

After graduating from college, Zirkle decided to try to hike the entire length of the Appalachian Trail. This famous backpacking route runs 2,167 miles through the Appalachian Mountains, from Georgia to Maine. After walking all but the last 100 miles, she decided that the hike was no longer challenging and abandoned the trail. At this point, she decided to return to Alaska. She loaded up a backpack with clothes and took off.

Upon arriving in Alaska in 1993, Zirkle settled in the tiny village of Bettles, located in the middle of a vast area of roadless wilderness north of the Arctic Circle. She worked as a biologist

for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and also did some construction work and trapping. Her first winter in Bettles, Zirkle bought a snowmobile and explored the mountains of the nearby Brooks Range. "I decided my first winter that I should travel, in order to avoid any hint of cabin fever," she recalled. "So, several of the locals convinced me to buy a snowmachine. I did explore much of the Brooks Range and the foothills to the south that winter. However, come spring my back hurt and I had a constant ringing in my ears."

"The next winter I decided to heck with all that noise and graduated to a more elite method of transportation: a dog team. Not only did I now have a group of happy companions to travel with, but I enjoyed what I saw so much more because I could hear the owls hoot, the wolves cry, and I took my time passing through the mountains."

The following year, a villager in Bettles gave Zirkle an old sled dog named Skunk. A short time after she got Skunk, Zirkle made the mistake of taking off his leash during a walk. He ran off and ended up tormenting the people of Bettles for ten days before she finally caught him in a live trap. "When I saw him in there I walked up and I said, 'Okay, if you growl at me I'm going to have to shoot you.' But he wagged his tail. So I had to keep him," she explained.

Skunk helped raise Zirkle's interest in the sport of dog sledding, also known as mushing. When winter arrived again, she explored the mountains using a dog sled instead of a snowmobile. "The next winter I decided to heck with all that noise and graduated to a more elite method of transportation: a dog team," she noted. "Not only did I now have a group of happy companions to travel with, but I enjoyed what I saw so much more because I could hear the owls hoot, the wolves cry, and I took my time passing through the mountains."

Over the next few years, Zirkle began putting together her own dog team. She collected Alaskan huskies from some of the villages near Bettles, which were known as the training ground of the legendary musher George Attla. She purchased a few dogs from villagers, and she rescued several others from a flood. Then she began breeding the dogs to get the desired characteristics of strength, speed, and endurance. As she put together a good team, she began to think about dog sled racing.

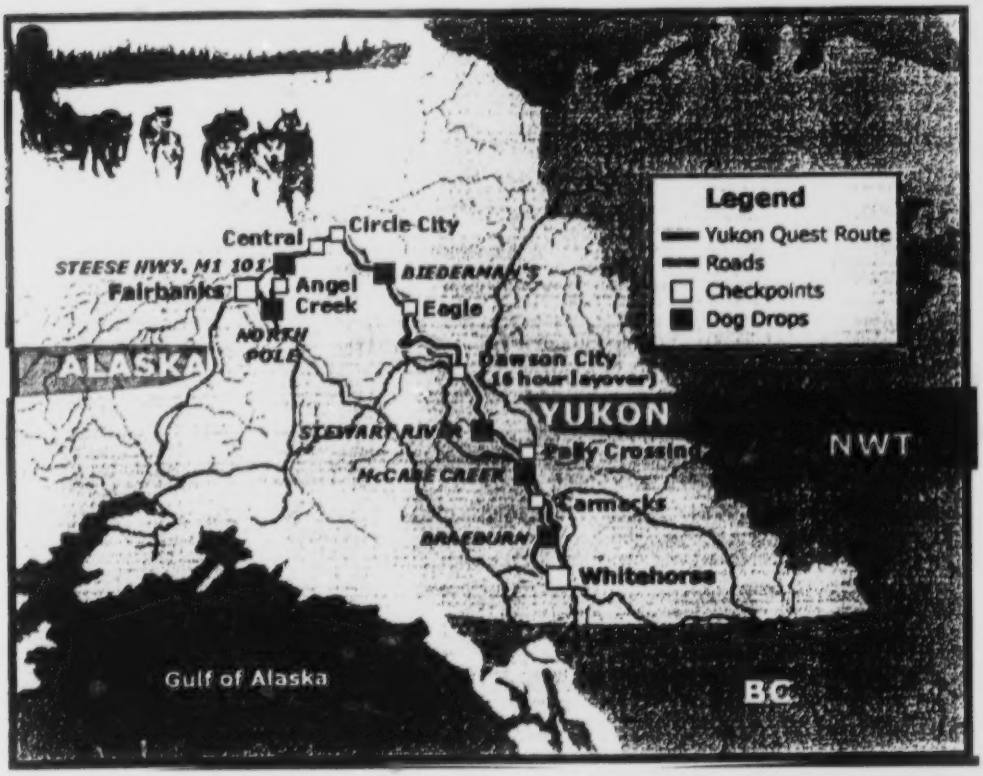
Starting Her Own Kennel

When she began to get serious about raising and training sled dogs, Zirkle moved to Two Rivers, Alaska. This small town, located west of Fairbanks, is the home of dozens of top mushers. It lies in the middle of a 300-mile network of dog sledding trails. Along with her training partner, Jerry Louden, Zirkle started her own kennel. "My kennel is [called] Skunk's Place," she related. "My dogs and I travel a lot, both for work and fun. Since we are always on the move, I couldn't come up with a certain river or mountain [to use for the name of the kennel]. So, I thought, the one thing that would surely be constant in my kennel is my retired leader: Skunk. So, wherever Skunk is, you'll find the kennel."

"I believe if I raise fewer puppies then each pup will become bonded and fully committed to me. Then in their adult years this commitment never wears off—it only strengthens as we compete together and succeed together."

One of the keys to Zirkle's kennel operation was her ability to pick dogs that would perform well in harness. "Aliy's got a real good eye for dogs," Louden said. "She can look at a dog and tell that it will be good or not." "I go by the physique," Zirkle explained. "Then there's this spunk part you can pick up on. I can usually tell after watching them for a while." Zirkle and Louden chose to keep the kennel relatively small—about 30 to 40 dogs—in order to give each dog more time and attention. "I believe if I raise fewer puppies then each pup will become bonded and fully committed to me," Zirkle noted. "Then in their adult years this commitment never wears off—it only strengthens as we compete together and succeed together."

Zirkle soon found that running a kennel is very expensive. For example, her dogs consume 16,000 pounds of kibble and 6,000 pounds of fresh meat and fish a year. Caring for the dogs is also very time consuming. Zirkle must feed and exercise each dog daily. She also builds them individual dog houses, cleans up after them, and makes sure that they get good veterinary care. One of Zirkle's time-saving tricks involves teaching the dogs to return to their houses after a training run. "When I bring a 12-dog team from a training run, I am usually not greeted by hordes of people waiting to help me unharness dogs," she said. "Therefore, the dogs and I have an agreement. I leave them in their harnesses while I put a snack or broth in their feed pans. Then I can let most of them go and they will make their



way through the dog yard to their specific house and their snack. Then I follow them and hook them up to their tethers."

In the summer, when it is too hot for training, Zirkle walks her dogs in small groups or takes them swimming. Beginning in August, she prepares them for pulling a sled by running them in front of a four-wheeler. Throughout the fall months, she exercises them regularly in order to develop their speed, endurance, and attitude. She finishes up her training with a few winter camping trips in December. Then the dogs are ready to race at the beginning of the year.

Entering the Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race

Zirkle entered her first race — the Henry Hann Sled Dog Race — in January 1998. This 200-mile event on the trails near Two Rivers was a warm-up for one of the world's premier mushing events, the Yukon Quest. Known as "the toughest race in the world," the Yukon Quest covers over 1,000 miles of wilderness between the town of Whitehorse in Canada's Yukon Territory and the city of Fairbanks in central Alaska. It is similar to the more famous Iditarod, but the terrain is more rugged and isolated. The trail climbs over four mountains higher than 3,000 feet and also runs through the

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Zirkle at a checkpoint during her championship Yukon Quest race in 2000.

jumbled ice of the frozen Yukon River. The temperatures along the trail sometimes reach 80 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

Unlike the Iditarod, in which mushers with lightly loaded sleds dash between 27 checkpoints, participants in the Yukon Quest haul heavier loads between just eight checkpoints. The mushers must camp out and carry all of their equipment and supplies on their sleds, like the explorers and trappers from the Gold Rush era of the 1800s. The Yukon Quest has one mandatory 36-hour rest stop in Dawson City. But the mushers do not usually get much rest because they are required to feed and care for their dogs first. During an ordinary day on the Yukon Quest trail, each sled dog needs to eat approximately the number of calories in 20 double cheeseburgers, or even more if the weather is very cold. The dogs also wear booties to protect their feet, and these must be changed at every stop. Mushers start the race with 14 dogs and usually drop some at checkpoints along the way due to illness, injury, or bad attitude. They are not allowed to replace dogs that are dropped once the race begins.

Zirkle entered the Yukon Quest for the first time in February 1998. The events of this race are covered in John Balzar's book *Yukon Alone*. "Really, I just want to see if I can do it," Zirkle told Balzar before the race. "I think it's going to be [extremely] hard. I want to see. Sometimes I think it will be fun, but the truth is, I don't have any idea."

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As it turned out, Zirkle experienced a number of problems on the trail. First, she came down with the flu almost immediately after the race began. For the first half of the race, she was weak, feverish, and vomiting along the trail. Balzar describes her struggling to care for her dogs during a rest stop: "Woozy, battling waves of nausea, she feels herself stagger and droop. No, she tells herself. A musher must exude leadership and confidence above all, for the team must never doubt that the greatest and only thing in all the world is to be a sled dog and to be out here right now, in Aliy's company, running around the clock, hell-bent in the dead of winter. Maintaining this spirit in the animals is one of the magic tricks of mushing."

Zirkle's second problem was that one of her dogs died suddenly during the race. Prince, a seemingly healthy five-year-old, just collapsed along the trail. Such tragic incidents happen occasionally in sled dog racing, and race authorities take them very seriously. Although an autopsy later showed that Prince had died of natural causes—with no evidence of mistreatment or neglect—Zirkle was still broken-hearted. "In your heart, you never think anything bad is going to happen to your dogs," she stated. "Half the time, you think to yourself that the dogs get as much out of [racing] as you do." Despite these difficulties, however, Zirkle managed to finish 17th out of 38 starters during her rookie Yukon Quest. She covered the 1,000 miles in a time of 13 days, 21 hours, and 40 minutes. She also won the Sportsman Award for her cheerful nature on the trail.

Becoming the First Woman to Win the Yukon Quest

At the time Zirkle entered her first Yukon Quest, no woman had ever won the race. In fact, the highest a woman had ever placed in the Quest was third. "I'd love to see a woman win the Quest," Zirkle noted, "but I'd love to see a woman be president, too, and it's been 200 years." Still, women had enjoyed considerable success in sled dog racing. Two women had managed to win the Iditarod—Libby Riddles in 1985, and Susan Butcher four times between 1986 and 1990. (For further information on Butcher, see *Biography Today Sports Series*, Vol. 1.) During Zirkle's second attempt at the Yukon Quest in 1999, she impressed many people by finishing fourth, ahead of two former champions. She collected a prize of $18,000 and also won the Challenger of the North award.

But Zirkle would not be satisfied until she won the Yukon Quest. She entered the 2000 event with her strongest team yet. Now that she was more familiar with the trail, she was able to come up with a plan to help her win. "I had a plan going into the whole thing," she stated. "We stuck to

that plan and that put me an hour or so ahead of everyone else." Zirkle also had an outstanding pit crew—including her father, sister, and several friends—to help her care for the dogs during the mandatory rest stop in Dawson City. "They even had clipboards hanging on the trees that told them about what dogs needed medicine and what dogs needed massage," she recalled.

Zirkle ended up being the first musher to return to the trail from Dawson City, although Canadian Thomas Tetz was close behind. She gradually increased her lead to one hour, 20 minutes at the next checkpoint. But Tetz cut his team's rest time in order to follow Zirkle out of Pelly Crossing. He was only six minutes behind with 225 miles left in the race. Zirkle rebuilt her lead to two hours at the 150-miles-to-go mark, but Tetz charged once again until he had cut the gap to 30 minutes. Zirkle had the stronger team, however, and held on to win the 2000 Yukon Quest. Her time of 10 days, 22 hours, 57 minutes was the third-fastest in the 17-year history of the race. She became the first woman and youngest person ever to win the Quest and earn the $30,000 top prize.

"The 2000 Yukon Quest was a culmination of hard work and dedication—both canine and human. I brought one of the best dog teams that I have ever run to the starting line in Fairbanks. They proved to be the toughest and fastest over the next ten days and made me very proud to be part of such an amazing team."

After the 1,000-mile ordeal ended, Zirkle was completely exhausted. "My legs are swollen, I've got edema [swelling] up and down my legs, black and blue spots, and my dogs are skinny," she noted. But she still found the energy to thank her winning dog team—Pedro, AJ, Diesel, Fats, Martin, Sonic, Roller, Bob, Beaner, Fatty Junes, Cisco, Scotty, Grill, and Roger. "The 2000 Yukon Quest was a culmination of hard work and dedication—both canine and human," she explained. "I brought one of the best dog teams that I have ever run to the starting line in Fairbanks. They proved to be the toughest and fastest over the next ten days and made me very proud to be part of such an amazing team."

Over the next few months, Zirkle received a lot of attention as the first woman to win the grueling event. She was interviewed for newspapers and television news shows, for example, and she did photo shoots for *National*

The 2000 Yukon Quest.

Geographic Adventure and *Marie Claire* magazines. The attention sometimes seemed a bit overwhelming for someone who spent most of her time alone or in the company of dogs. But Zirkle appreciated the fact that the publicity brought her new opportunities and additional sponsorship money. "I expected to get noticed, but I didn't expect it to last so long," she said. "I didn't really expect to be in *People* magazine and that kind of thing. But what the heck. I mean, if people are interested I'm more than willing to go a little bit out of my way to see that happen."

Tackling the Iditarod

After accomplishing her goal of winning the Yukon Quest, Zirkle was not sure what challenge to undertake next. "I wanted to win the Yukon Quest, and I did," she stated. "I never said I wanted to win it twice. I can either ride the wave right now and . . . see where it takes me, or I can swim back under, catch another wave, and go in a different direction. That's a huge choice right now." After thinking about it for a while, she decided to tackle Alaska's other great sled dog race, the Iditarod. "I guess to tell you the

truth, the Iditarod was always there. It's a challenge that lays out there and kind of tempts you to do it," she noted. "It should be a total learning experience for me. It's going to be fun. My dogs have done the Quest trail long enough. They're kinda like, 'Let's head west. . . .'"

The Iditarod, known as "the last great race on earth," is held each year in early March. During the race, each musher and team of sled dogs covers 1,157 miles across Alaska from Anchorage to Nome. The race honors the efforts of a heroic group of mushers who, in 1925, rushed desperately needed serum along the route to prevent a diphtheria epidemic that threatened the people of Nome. The Iditarod Trail passes through two mountain ranges and crosses many ice-covered rivers and part of the frozen Bering Sea. Participants in the race face temperatures that can reach 50 degrees below zero, winds that can gust up to 140 miles per hour, intense blizzards that can create whiteout conditions, and encounters with wild animals that can sometimes turn violent.

Zirkle's description of mushing shows how much she loves her dogs and the outdoors: "You are going down the trail and you turn your light out and it's dark, and you have stars and really bright ones, and you can see the outlines of [the dogs'] heads and the breath coming from their mouths and a little aura coming from each one of them. You feel like you're floating. . . . It is like you are dancing with them."

The Iditarod is older and better known than the Yukon Quest. In recent years, it has attracted a huge following of fans and a great deal of media attention. The Iditarod also features a prize of $62,000 for the winner, more than twice the amount given to the winner of the Quest. Mushers who have competed in both events generally say that the Yukon Quest is harder, but that the Iditarod attracts tougher competition. "When people talk about how tough this trail is, I don't shrug it off but I say a trail is a trail," Zirkle said before the race. "I think I could get by in about any situation except downtown Manhattan."

In the 2001 Iditarod, Zirkle was one of eight women in the field of 68 mushers. Many people expected her to do well, and she was often mentioned among the top candidates for rookie-of-the-year honors. Unfortunately, Zirkle experienced problems from the beginning of the race. Warm

temperatures left little snow on parts of the trail. To make matters worse, her team of 16 dogs caught a respiratory virus that left them tired and coughing. "They would look at me and say, 'We should be in bed, Mom,'" she recalled. "I just write it off to experience." Zirkle had to send five of her dogs home almost immediately because they were too sick to continue, and she dropped three more before she reached the halfway point. She let the other dogs take turns riding on the sled to rest, although this made the load heavier for the remaining dogs.

Zirkle finally finished the Iditarod in 33rd place. Although she was disappointed in the result, she was proud of her team's effort. "Once I realized I wasn't racing to win, I looked at the trail as some amazing terrain. That was eye-opening," she related. "Lots of gale-force winds and whiteouts. Your dogs could see the trail, but you couldn't see more than 10 to 12 feet." After she completed the Iditarod, she was asked to compare its difficulty to the Yukon Quest. "It probably varies from year to year," she answered. "For me, this year's Iditarod with its 50 mile stretch of mud and dirt instead of snow, the storms, and having a dog team sicker than I have ever seen a dog team, was very tough. But my rookie Yukon Quest in 1998 was the toughest race I've ever been in."

The "Arctic Zirkle"

Thanks to her success in sled dog racing and her enjoyment of the Alaskan wilderness, Aliy is sometimes referred to as the "Arctic Zirkle" (which rhymes with Arctic Circle). "I can't explain why I like it out there other than it's challenging," she stated. "It's about freedom, where you can grasp at life a little more." Her description of the experience of mushing shows how much she loves her dogs and the outdoors: "You are going down the trail and you turn your light out and it's dark, and you have stars and really bright ones, and you can see the outlines of [the dogs'] heads and the breath coming from their mouths and a little aura coming from

each one of them. You feel like you're floating. . . . It is like you are dancing with them."

Some people criticize the sport of sled dog racing, claiming that it is cruel to the dogs. But Zirkle and other responsible mushers take good care of their dogs. Zirkle insists that her dogs are well-conditioned athletes that love to run. She also notes that she never asks more of them than she asks of herself. "I run dogs because I enjoy it and they enjoy it. I do push them to their limits, but I push myself as hard as well," she noted. "In either the Yukon Quest or the Iditarod it is important to finish with a happy, healthy, strong dog team. But if you are in the front-running pack, there is very little chance that you are up there by accident."

"I run dogs because I enjoy it and they enjoy it. I do push them to their limits, but I push myself as hard as well. In either the Yukon Quest or the Iditarod it is important to finish with a happy, healthy, strong dog team. But if you are in the front-running pack, there is very little chance that you are up there by accident."

HOME AND FAMILY

When Zirkle first moved to Two Rivers, she lived in a 16-foot by 16-foot cabin that had running water only during the summer. Her quarters were so small that she sometimes kept frozen salmon for the dogs in her bathtub. But she recently completed building a new, 1,700-square-foot, cedar-sided house on her 10-acre spread in Two Rivers. Zirkle designed her home and did most of the work herself. It is ideally suited for both her needs and those of her dogs. "I built my house around this dog yard," she noted. "I have two huge windows that look down on the dogs."

Zirkle, who is not married, remains very close to her family. Her parents often visit her in Alaska and help out during her races. Her older sister, Kaz, has been living with her and has turned Skunk's Place Kennel into a professional outfit with a Web site and fund-raising events. "There was no way I could put the time aside [to do fund-raising], run dogs, and do work," Aliy admitted. "It turns out it's pretty much a full-time job." Kaz was formerly one of only a few female boat captains in the Caribbean. Certified by the U.S. Coast Guard to pilot boats up to 100 tons, she took tourists on whale and dolphin watching tours.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In her limited free time, Zirkle enjoys traveling and camping. She also likes to watch movies on television, but she admits that she usually falls asleep before the end.

When the racing season is over, Zirkle uses her dog teams to take tourists on 200-mile treks into Gates of the Arctic National Park. She also occasionally works at construction jobs or as a waitress at the Two Rivers Bar.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Sportsman Award, Yukon Quest: 1998
Challenger of the North Award, Yukon Quest: 1999
Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race: 2000, 1st place

FURTHER READING

Books

Balzar, John. *Yukon Alone: The World's Toughest Adventure Race,* 1999

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Anchorage Daily News, Feb. 18, 1999, p.C1; Feb. 22, 2000, p.C1; Feb. 24, 2000, p.A1; Dec. 13, 2000, p.C1; Feb. 4, 2001, p.D1; Feb. 20, 2001 (online edition); Mar. 8, 2001, p.A1
Fairbanks (Alaska) Daily News-Miner, Feb. 24, 2000
Manchester Guardian Weekly (England), Apr. 12, 2000, p.24
St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Apr. 6, 2001, p.F1
Seattle Times, Feb. 24, 2000 (online edition)

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WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.geocities.com/skunks_place/
http://www.sleddogcentral.com/interviews/zirkle.htm
http://www.yukonquest.org
http://www.iditarod.com/zirklealiy.html

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Aliy Zirkle/Photos: Matt Hage; Skunk's Place Sled Dog Kennel. Matt Hage; Map: Yukon Quest.

How to Use the Cumulative Index

Our indexes have a new look. In an effort to make our indexes easier to use, we've combined the Name and General Index into a new, cumulative General Index. This single ready-reference resource covers all the volumes in *Biography Today,* both the general series and the special subject series. The new General Index contains complete listings of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. Their names appear in bold-faced type, followed by the issue in which they appear. The General Index also includes references for the occupations, nationalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled in *Biography Today.*

We have also made some changes to our specialty indexes, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index. To consolidate and to save space, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index will no longer appear in the January and April issues of the softbound subscription series. But these indexes can still be found in the September issue of the softbound subscription series, in the hardbound Annual Cumulation at the end of each year, and in each volume of the special subject series.

General Series

The General Series of *Biography Today* is denoted in the index with the month and year of the issue in which the individual appeared. Each individual also appears in the Annual Cumulation for that year.

Bush, George W. ..... Sep 00; Update 00
Earnhardt, Dale ..... Apr 01
Hill, Faith ..... Sep 01
Holdsclaw, Chamique ..... Sep 00
Kim Dae-jung ..... Sep 01
L'Engle, Madeleine ..... Jan 92; Apr 01
***N Sync** ..... Jan 01
Payton, Walter ..... Jan 00
Prinze, Freddie, Jr. ..... Apr 00
Roberts, Julia ..... Sep 01
Rowling, J.K. ..... Sep 99; Update 00
Spears, Britney ..... Jan 01
Tucker, Chris ..... Jan 01

Special Subject Series

The Special Subject Series of *Biography Today* are each denoted in the index with an abbreviated form of the series name, plus the number of the volume in which the individual appears. They are listed as follows.

Adams, Ansel ..... Artist V.1 (Artists Series)
Coville, Bruce ..... Author V.9 (Author Series)
Fanning, Shawn ..... Science V.5 (Scientists & Inventors Series)
George, Eddie ..... Sport V.6 (Sports Series)
Peterson, Roger Tory ..... WorLdr V.1 (World Leaders Series: Environmental Leaders)
Sadat, Anwar ..... WorLdr V.2 (World Leaders Series: Modern African Leaders)
Wolf, Hazel ..... WorLdr V.3 (World Leaders Series: Environmental Leaders 2)

Updates

Updated information on selected individuals appears in the Appendix at the end of the *Biography Today* Annual Cumulation. In the index, the original entry is listed first, followed by any updates.

Arafat, Yasir .. Sep 94; Update 94; Update 95; Update 96; Update 97; Update 98; Update 00
Gates, Bill ... Apr 93; Update 98; Update 00; Science V.5
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8	Hawking, Stephen W.	1942
9	McLean, A.J.	1978
	Menchu, Rigoberta	1959
	Nixon, Richard	1913
11	Leopold, Aldo	1887
12	Amanpour, Christiane	1958
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	Lasseter, John	?1957
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13	Webb, Alan	1983
14	Lucid, Shannon	1943
15	Werbach, Adam	1973
16	Fossey, Dian	1932
17	Carrey, Jim	1962
	Cormier, Robert	1925
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18	Ali, Muhammad	1942
	Messier, Mark	1961
19	Askins, Renee	1959
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21	Domingo, Placido	1941
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22	Chavis, Benjamin	1948
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23	Thiessen, Tiffani-Amber	1974
24	Haddock, Doris (Granny D)	1910
25	Alley, Kirstie	1955
26	Carter, Vince	1977
	Morita, Akio	1921
	Siskel, Gene	1946
27	Lester, Julius	1939
28	Carter, Nick	1980
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	Gretzky, Wayne	1961
29	Abbey, Edward	1927
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	Peet, Bill	1915
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30	Alexander, Lloyd	1924
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31	Flannery, Sarah	1982
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	Timberlake, Justin	1981

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5	Aaron, Hank	1934
6	Leakey, Mary	1913
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7	Brooks, Garth	1962
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8	Grisham, John	1955
9	Love, Susan	1948
10	Konigsburg, E.L.	1930
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11	Aniston, Jennifer	1969
	Brandy	1979
	Rowland, Kelly	1981
	Yolen, Jane	1939
12	Blume, Judy	1938
	Kurzweil, Raymond	1948
	Woodson, Jacqueline	?1964
13	Moss, Randy	1977
15	Groening, Matt	1954
	Jagr, Jaromir	1972
	Van Dyken, Amy	1973

February (continued)		Year
16	Freeman, Cathy	1973
17	Anderson, Marian	1897
	Hargreaves, Alison	1962
	Jordan, Michael	1963
18	Morrison, Toni	1931
19	Tan, Amy	1952
20	Adams, Ansel	1902
	Barkley, Charles	1963
	Cobain, Kurt	1967
	Crawford, Cindy	1966
	Hernandez, Livan	1975
	Littrell, Brian	1975
21	Carpenter, Mary Chapin	1958
	Hewitt, Jennifer Love	1979
	Jordan, Barbara	1936
	Mugabe, Robert	1924
22	Barrymore, Drew	1975
	Fernandez, Lisa	1971
24	Jobs, Steven	1955
	Vernon, Mike	1963
	Whitestone, Heather	1973
25	Voigt, Cynthia	1942
26	Thompson, Jenny	1973
27	Clinton, Chelsea	1980
	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne	1942
28	Andretti, Mario	1940
	Pauling, Linus	1901

March		Year
1	Ellison, Ralph Waldo	1914
	Murie, Olaus J.	1889
	Rabin, Yitzhak	1922
	Zamora, Pedro	1972
2	Gorbachev, Mikhail	1931
	Satcher, David	1941
	Seuss, Dr.	1904
3	Hooper, Geoff	1979
	Joyner-Kersee, Jackie	1962
	MacLachlan, Patricia	1938
4	Armstrong, Robb	1962
	Morgan, Garrett	1877
5	Margulis, Lynn	1938
6	Ashley, Maurice	1966
7	McCarty, Oseola	1908
8	Prinze, Freddie Jr.	1976
10	Guy, Jasmine	1964
	Miller, Shannon	1977
	Wolf, Hazel	1898
12	Hamilton, Virginia	1936
	Nye, Naomi Shihab	1952
13	Van Meter, Vicki	1982
14	Dayne, Ron	1977
	Hanson, Taylor	1983
	Williamson, Kevin	1965
15	Ginsburg, Ruth Bader	1933
16	O'Neal, Shaquille	1972
17	Hamm, Mia	1972
	Nureyev, Rudolf	1938
18	Blair, Bonnie	1964
	de Klerk, F.W.	1936
	Queen Latifah	1970
19	Blanchard, Rachel	1976
20	Lee, Spike	1957
	Lowry, Lois	1937
	Sachar, Louis	1954
21	Gilbert, Walter	1932
	O'Donnell, Rosie	1962
22	Shatner, William	1931
24	Manning, Peyton	1976
25	Dragila, Stacy	1971
	Franklin, Aretha	1942
	Lovell, Jim	1928
	Steinem, Gloria	1934
	Swoopes, Sheryl	1971
26	Allen, Marcus	1960
	Erdös, Paul	1913
	O'Connor, Sandra Day	1930
	Stockton, John	1962
27	Carey, Mariah	1970
	Wrede, Patricia C.	1953
28	James, Cheryl	
	McEntire, Reba	1955
	Tompkins, Douglas	1943
29	Capriati, Jennifer	1976
30	Dion, Celine	1968
	Hammer	1933
31	Chavez, Cesar	1927
	Gore, Al	1948
	Howe, Gordie	1928

April		Year
1	Maathai, Wangari	1940
2	Carvey, Dana	1955
3	Garth, Jennie	1972
	Goodall, Jane	1934
	Street, Picabo	1971
4	Angelou, Maya	1928
5	Powell, Colin	1937

April (continued)		Year
6	Watson, James D.	1928
7	Douglas, Marjory Stoneman	1890
8	Annan, Kofi	1938
10	Madden, John	1936
12	Cleary, Beverly	1916
	Danes, Claire	1979
	Doherty, Shannen	1971
	Hawk, Tony	1968
	Letterman, David	1947
	Soto, Gary	1952
13	Brandis, Jonathan	1976
	Henry, Marguerite	1902
14	Gellar, Sarah Michelle	1977
	Maddux, Greg	1966
	Rose, Pete	1941
15	Martin, Bernard	1954
16	Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem	1947
	Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia	1984
	Selena	1971
	Williams, Garth	1912
17	Champagne, Larry III	1985
18	Hart, Melissa Joan	1976
20	Brundtland, Gro Harlem	1939
21	Muir, John	1838
22	Levi-Montalcini, Rita	1909
	Oppenheimer, J. Robert	1904
25	Fitzgerald, Ella	1917
26	Giff, Patricia Reilly	1935
	Pei, I.M.	1917
27	Wilson, August	1945
28	Alba, Jessica	1981
	Baker, James	1930
	Duncan, Lois	1934
	Hussein, Saddam	1937
	Kaunda, Kenneth	1924
	Lee, Harper	1926
	Leno, Jay	1950
29	Agassi, Andre	1970
	Earnhardt, Dale	1951
	Seinfeld, Jerry	1954

May		Year
2	Spock, Benjamin	1903
4	Bass, Lance	1979
5	Lionni, Leo	1910
	Maxwell, Jody-Anne	1986
	Opdyke, Irene Gut	1922
	Strasser, Todd	1950
7	Land, Edwin	1909
8	Attenborough, David	1926
9	Bergen, Candice	1946
	Yzerman, Steve	1965
10	Cooney, Caroline B.	1947
	Curtis, Christopher Paul	1953
	Galdikas, Biruté	1946
	Jamison, Judith	1944
	Ochoa, Ellen	1958
11	Farrakhan, Louis	1933
12	Mowat, Farley	1921
13	Pascal, Francine	1938
	Rodman, Dennis	1961
14	Lucas, George	1944
	Smith, Emmitt	1969
15	Albright, Madeleine	1937
	Johns, Jasper	1930
	Zindel, Paul	1936
16	Coville, Bruce	1950
17	Paulsen, Gary	1939
18	John Paul II	1920
19	Brody, Jane	1941
	Garnett, Kevin	1976
	Hansberry, Lorraine	1930
21	Robinson, Mary	1944
23	Bardeen, John	1908
	Jewel	1974
	O'Dell, Scott	1898
24	Dumars, Joe	1963
26	Hill, Lauryn	1975
	Ride, Sally	1951
27	Carson, Rachel	1907
	Kerr, M.E.	1927
28	Johnston, Lynn	1947
	Shabazz, Betty	1936
30	Cohen, Adam Ezra	1979

June		Year
1	Lalas, Alexi	1970
	Morissette, Alanis	1974
4	Kistler, Darci	1964
	Nelson, Gaylord	1916
5	Scarry, Richard	1919
6	Rylant, Cynthia	1954
7	Brooks, Gwendolyn	1917
	Oleynik, Larisa	1981
8	Bush, Barbara	1925
	Davenport, Lindsay	1976
	Edelman, Marian Wright	1939
	Wayans, Keenen Ivory	1958
	Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869
9	Portman, Natalie	1981

June (continued)		Year
10	Frank, Anne	1929
	Lipinski, Tara	1982
	Sendak, Maurice	1928
11	Cousteau, Jacques	1910
	Montana, Joe	1956
12	Bush, George	1924
13	Allen, Tim	1953
	Alvarez, Luis W.	1911
	Christo	1935
14	Bourke-White, Margaret	1904
	Graf, Steffi	1969
	Summitt, Pat	1952
	Yep, Laurence	1948
15	Horner, Jack	1946
	Jacques, Brian	1939
16	McClintock, Barbara	1902
	Shakur, Tupac	1971
17	Gingrich, Newt	1943
	Jansen, Dan	1965
	Williams, Venus	1980
18	Johnson, Angela	1961
	Morris, Nathan	1971
	Van Allsburg, Chris	1949
19	Abdul, Paula	1962
	Aung San Suu Kyi	1945
20	Goodman, John	1952
21	Bhutto, Benazir	1953
	Breathed, Berke	1957
22	Bradley, Ed	1941
	Daly, Carson	1973
	Warner, Kurt	1971
23	Rudolph, Wilma	1940
	Thomas, Clarence	1948
25	Carle, Eric	1929
	Gibbs, Lois	1951
26	Harris, Bernard	1956
	Jeter, Derek	1974
	LeMond, Greg	1961
27	Babbitt, Bruce	1938
	Dunbar, Paul Laurence	1872
	Perot, H. Ross	1930
28	Elway, John	1960
30	Ballard, Robert	1942

July		Year
1	Brower, David	1912
	Calderone, Mary S.	1904
	Diana, Princess of Wales	1961
	Duke, David	1950
	Lewis, Carl	1961
	McCully, Emily Arnold	1939
2	Bethe, Hans A.	1906
	George, Jean Craighead	1919
	Marshall, Thurgood	1908
	Petty, Richard	1937
	Thomas, Dave	1932
5	Watterson, Bill	1958
6	Bush, George W.	1946
	Dalai Lama	1935
	Dumitriu, Ioana	1976
7	Chagall, Marc	1887
	Heinlein, Robert	1907
	Kwan, Michelle	1980
	Sakic, Joe	1969
	Stachowski, Richie	1985
8	Hardaway, Anfernee "Penny"	1971
	Sealfon, Rebecca	1983
9	Farmer, Nancy	1941
	Hanks, Tom	1956
	Hassan II	1929
	Krim, Mathilde	1926
	Sacks, Oliver	1933
10	Ashe, Arthur	1943
	Boulmerka, Hassiba	1969
11	Cisneros, Henry	1947
	White, E.B.	1899
12	Cosby, Bill	1937
	Johnson, Johanna	1983
	Yamaguchi, Kristi	1972
13	Ford, Harrison	1942
	Stewart, Patrick	1940
15	Aristide, Jean-Bertrand	1953
	Ventura, Jesse	1951
16	Johnson, Jimmy	1943
	Sanders, Barry	1968
18	Glenn, John	1921
	Lemelson, Jerome	1923
	Mandela, Nelson	1918
19	Tarvin, Herbert	1985
20	Hillary, Sir Edmund	1919
21	Chastain, Brandi	1968
	Reno, Janet	1938
	Riley, Dawn	1964
	Williams, Robin	1952
22	Calder, Alexander	1898
	Dole, Bob	1923
	Hinton, S.E.	1948
23	Haile Selassie	1892
	Williams, Michelle	1980

July (continued)		Year
24	Abzug, Bella	1920
	Krone, Julie	1963
	Moss, Cynthia	1940
	Wilson, Mara	1987
25	Payton, Walter	1954
26	Berenstain, Jan	1923
27	Rodriguez, Alex	1975
28	Davis, Jim	1945
	Pottter, Beatrix	1866
29	Burns, Ken	1953
	Creech, Sharon	1945
	Dole, Elizabeth Hanford	1936
	Jennings, Peter	1938
	Morris, Wanya	1973
30	Hill, Anita	1956
	Moore, Henry	1898
	Schroeder, Pat	1940
31	Cronin, John	1950
	Reid Banks, Lynne	1929
	Rowling, J. K.	1965
	Weinke, Chris	1972

August		Year
1	Brown, Ron	1941
	Coolio	1963
	Garcia, Jerry	1942
2	Baldwin, James	1924
	Healy, Bernadine	1944
3	Roper, Dee Dee	
	Savimbi, Jonas	1934
4	Gordon, Jeff	1971
5	Ewing, Patrick	1962
	Jackson, Shirley Ann	1946
6	Cooney, Barbara	1917
	Robinson, David	1965
	Warhol, Andy	?1928
7	Byars, Betsy	1928
	Duchovny, David	1960
	Leakey, Louis	1903
8	Boyd, Candy Dawson	1946
	Chasez, JC	1976
9	Anderson, Gillian	1968
	Holdsclaw, Chamique	1977
	Houston, Whitney	1963
	McKissack, Patricia C.	1944
	Sanders, Deion	1967
	Travers, P.L.	?1899
11	Haley, Alex	1921
	Hogan, Hulk	1953
	Rowan, Carl T.	1925
	Wozniak, Steve	1950
12	Martin, Ann M.	1955
	McKissack, Fredrick L.	1939
	Myers, Walter Dean	1937
	Sampras, Pete	1971
13	Battle, Kathleen	1948
	Castro, Fidel	1927
14	Berry, Halle	?1967
	Johnson, Magic	1959
	Larson, Gary	1950
15	Affleck, Benjamin	1972
	Ellerbee, Linda	1944
16	Fu Mingxia	1978
	Thampy, George	1987
18	Danziger, Paula	1944
	Murie, Margaret	1902
19	Clinton, Bill	1946
	Soren, Tabitha	1967
20	Chung, Connie	1946
	Milosevic, Slobodan	1941
21	Chamberlain, Wilt	1936
	Draper, Sharon	1952
	Toro, Natalia	1984
22	Bradbury, Ray	1920
	Dorough, Howie	1973
	Schwarzkopf, H. Norman	1934
23	Bryant, Kobe	1978
	Novello, Antonia	1944
	Phoenix, River	1970
24	Arafat, Yasir	1929
	Dai Qing	1941
	Ripken, Cal, Jr.	1960
25	Case, Steve	1958
26	Burke, Christopher	1965
	Culkin, Macaulay	1980
	Sabin, Albert	1906
	Teresa, Mother	1910
	Tuttle, Merlin	1941
27	Nechita, Alexandra	1985
	Rinaldi, Ann	1934
28	Dove, Rita	1952
	Evans, Janet	1971
	Peterson, Roger Tory	1908
	Priestley, Jason	1969
	Rimes, LeAnn	1982
	Twain, Shania	1965
29	Grandin, Temple	1947
	Hesse, Karen	1952
	McCain, John	1936
30	Earle, Sylvia	1935
31	Perlman, Itzhak	1945

September		Year
1	Estefan, Gloria	1958
	Guy, Rosa	1925
	Smyers, Karen	1961
2	Bearden, Romare	?1912
	Galeczka, Chris	1981
	Lisanti, Mariangela	1983
3	Delany, Bessie	1891
4	Knowles, Beyoncé	1981
	Wright, Richard	1908
5	Guisewite, Cathy	1950
6	Fiorina, Carly	1954
7	Lawrence, Jacob	1917
	Moses, Grandma	1860
	Pippig, Uta	1965
	Scurry, Briana	1971
8	Prelutsky, Jack	1940
	Scieszka, Jon	1954
	Thomas, Jonathan Taylor	1982
10	Gould, Stephen Jay	1941
13	Johnson, Michael	1967
	Monroe, Bill	1911
	Taylor, Mildred D.	1943
14	Armstrong, William H.	1914
	Stanford, John	1938
15	dePaola, Tomie	1934
	Marino, Dan	1961
16	Dahl, Roald	1916
	Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.	1950
17	Burger, Warren	1907
18	Armstrong, Lance	1971
	Carson, Ben	1951
	de Mille, Agnes	1905
	Fields, Debbi	1956
19	Delany, Sadie	1889
21	Fielder, Cecil	1963
	Hill, Faith	1967
	King, Stephen	1947
	Nkrumah, Kwame	1909
22	Richardson, Dot	1961
23	Nevelson, Louise	1899
24	George, Eddie	1973
	Ochoa, Severo	1905
25	Gwaltney, John Langston	1928
	Locklear, Heather	1961
	Lopez, Charlotte	1976
	Pippen, Scottie	1965
	Reeve, Christopher	1952
	Smith, Will	1968
	Walters, Barbara	1931
26	Mandela, Winnie	1934
	Stockman, Shawn	1972
	Williams, Serena	1981
27	Handford, Martin	1956
28	Cray, Seymour	1925
	Pak, Se Ri	1977
29	Berenstain, Stan	1923
	Guey, Wendy	1983
	Gumbel, Bryant	1948
30	Hingis, Martina	1980
	Moceanu, Dominique	1981

October		Year
1	Carter, Jimmy	1924
	McGwire, Mark	1963
2	Leibovitz, Annie	1949
3	Campbell, Neve	1973
	Herriot, James	1916
	Richardson, Kevin	1972
	Winfield, Dave	1951
4	Cushman, Karen	1941
	Rice, Anne	1941
5	Fitzhugh, Louise	1928
	Hill, Grant	1972
	Lemieux, Mario	1965
	Lin, Maya	1959
	Winslet, Kate	1975
6	Bennett, Cherie	1960
	Lobo, Rebecca	1973
7	Ma, Yo-Yo	1955
8	Jackson, Jesse	1941
	Ringgold, Faith	1930
	Stine, R.L.	1943
	Winans, CeCe	1964
9	Bryan, Zachery Ty	1981
	Senghor, Léopold Sédar	1906
	Sorenstam, Annika	1970
10	Favre, Brett	1969
	Saro-Wiwa, Ken	1941
11	Perry, Luke	?1964
	Young, Steve	1961
12	Childress, Alice	?1920
	Jones, Marion	1975
	Ward, Charlie	1970
13	Carter, Chris	1956
	Kerrigan, Nancy	1969
	Rice, Jerry	1962
14	Daniel, Beth	1956
	Mobutu Sese Seko	1930

October (continued)		Year
15	Iacocca, Lee A.	1924
16	Stewart, Kordell	1972
17	Jemison, Mae	1956
	Kirkpatrick, Chris	1971
18	Foreman, Dave	1946
	Marsalis, Wynton	1961
	Navratilova, Martina	1956
	Suzuki, Shinichi	1898
19	Pullman, Philip	1946
20	Kenyatta, Jomo	?1891
	Mantle, Mickey	1931
	Pinsky, Robert	1940
21	Gillespie, Dizzy	1956
	Le Guin, Ursula K.	1929
22	Hanson, Zac	1985
23	Crichton, Michael	1942
	Pelé	1940
25	Martinez, Pedro	1971
26	Clinton, Hillary Rodham	1947
27	Anderson, Terry	1947
28	Gates, Bill	1955
	Roberts, Julia	1967
	Salk, Jonas	1914
29	Ryder, Winona	1971
31	Candy, John	1950
	Paterson, Katherine	1932
	Pauley, Jane	1950
	Tucker, Chris	1973

November		Year
2	lang, k.d.	1961
3	Arnold, Roseanne	1952
	Kiraly, Karch	1960
4	Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy)	1969
	Handler, Ruth	1916
8	Mittermeier, Russell A.	1949
9	Denton, Sandi	
	Sagan, Carl	1934
10	Bates, Daisy	?1914
11	DiCaprio, Leonardo	1974
	Vonnegut, Kurt	1922
12	Andrews, Ned	1980
	Blackmun, Harry	1908
	Harding, Tonya	1970
	Sosa, Sammy	1968
13	Goldberg, Whoopi	1949
14	Boutros-Ghali, Boutros	1922
	Hussein, King	1935
15	O'Keeffe, Georgia	1887
	Pinkwater, Daniel	1941
16	Baiul, Oksana	1977
	Miyamoto, Shigeru	1952
17	Fuentes, Daisy	1966
	Hanson, Ike	1980
18	Driscoll, Jean	1966
	Mankiller, Wilma	1945
19	Collins, Eileen	1956
	Devers, Gail	1966
	Glover, Savion	1973
	Strug, Kerri	1977
21	Aikman, Troy	1966
	Griffey, Ken, Jr.	1969
	Speare, Elizabeth George	1908
24	Ndeti, Cosmas	1971
25	Grant, Amy	1960
	Thomas, Lewis	1913
26	Patrick, Ruth	1907
	Pine, Elizabeth Michele	1975
	Schulz, Charles	1922
27	Nye, Bill	1955
	White, Jaleel	1977
29	L'Engle, Madeleine	1918
	Lewis, C. S.	1898
	Tubman, William V. S.	1895
30	Jackson, Bo	1962
	Parks, Gordon	1912

December		Year
2	Macaulay, David	1946
	Seles, Monica	1973
	Spears, Britney	1981
	Watson, Paul	1950
3	Kim Dae-jung	?1925
	Filipovic, Zlata	1980
5	Muniz, Frankie	1985
6	Risca, Viviana	1982
7	Bird, Larry	1956
8	Rivera, Diego	1886
9	Hopper, Grace Murray	1906
12	Bialik, Mayim	1975
	Frankenthaler, Helen	1928
	Sinatra, Frank	1915
13	Fedorov, Sergei	1969
14	Jackson, Shirley	1916
15	Aidid, Mohammed Farah	1934
	Mendes, Chico	1944
16	Bailey, Donovan	1967
	McCary, Michael	1971
	Mead, Margaret	1901
17	Kielburger, Craig	1982

December (continued)		Year
18	Aguilera, Christina	1980
	Holmes, Katie	1978
	Pitt, Brad	1964
	Sanchez Vicario, Arantxa	1971
	Spielberg, Steven	1947
19	Morrison, Sam	1936
	Sapp, Warren	1972
	White, Reggie	1961
20	Uchida, Mitsuko	1948
	Zirkle, Aliy	1969
21	Evert, Chris	1954
	Griffith Joyner, Florence	1959
	Stiles, Jackie	1978
	Webb, Karrie	1974
22	Pinkney, Jerry	1939
23	Avi	1937
	Harbaugh, Jim	1963
	Lowman, Meg	1953
24	Lowe, Alex	1958
	Martin, Ricky	1971
25	Sadat, Anwar	1918
26	Butcher, Susan	1954
27	Roberts, Cokie	1943
28	Lee, Stan	1922
	Washington, Denzel	1954
30	Woods, Tiger	1975

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Dan Jansen
Nancy Kerrigan
Alexi Lalas
Charlotte Lopez
Wilma Mankiller
Shannon Miller
Toni Morrison
Richard Nixon
Greg Norman
Severo Ochoa
River Phoenix
Elizabeth Pine
Jonas Salk
Richard Scarry
Emmitt Smith
Will Smith
Steven Spielberg
Patrick Stewart
R.L. Stine
Lewis Thomas
Barbara Walters
Charlie Ward
Steve Young
Kim Zmeskal

1995

Troy Aikman
Jean-Bertrand Aristide
Oksana Baiul
Halle Berry
Benazir Bhutto
Jonathan Brandis
Warren E. Burger
Ken Burns
Candace Cameron
Jimmy Carter
Agnes de Mille
Placido Domingo
Janet Evans
Patrick Ewing
Newt Gingrich
John Goodman
Amy Grant
Jesse Jackson
James Earl Jones
Julie Krone
David Letterman
Rush Limbaugh
Heather Locklear
Reba McEntire
Joe Montana
Cosmas Ndeti
Hakeem Olajuwon
Ashley Olsen
Mary-Kate Olsen
Jennifer Parkinson
Linus Pauling
Itzhak Perlman
Cokie Roberts
Wilma Rudolph
Salt 'N' Pepa
Barry Sanders
William Shatner
Elizabeth George Speare
Dr. Benjamin Spock
Jonathan Taylor Thomas
Vicki Van Meter
Heather Whitestone
Pedro Zamora

1996

Aung San Suu Kyi
Boyz II Men
Brandy
Ron Brown
Mariah Carey
Jim Carrey
Larry Champagne III
Christo
Chelsea Clinton
Coolio
Bob Dole
David Duchovny
Debbi Fields
Chris Galeczka
Jerry Garcia
Jennie Garth
Wendy Guey
Tom Hanks
Alison Hargreaves
Sir Edmund Hillary
Judith Jamison
Barbara Jordan
Annie Leibovitz
Carl Lewis
Jim Lovell
Mickey Mantle
Lynn Margulis
Iqbal Masih
Mark Messier
Larisa Oleynik
Christopher Pike
David Robinson
Dennis Rodman
Selena
Monica Seles
Don Shula
Kerri Strug
Tiffani-Amber Thiessen
Dave Thomas
Jaleel White

1997

Madeleine Albright
Marcus Allen
Gillian Anderson
Rachel Blanchard
Zachery Ty Bryan
Adam Ezra Cohen
Claire Danes
Celine Dion
Jean Driscoll
Louis Farrakhan
Ella Fitzgerald
Harrison Ford
Bryant Gumbel
John Johnson
Michael Johnson
Maya Lin
George Lucas
John Madden
Bill Monroe
Alanis Morissette
Sam Morrison
Rosie O'Donnell
Muammar el-Qaddafi
Christopher Reeve
Pete Sampras
Pat Schroeder
Rebecca Sealfon
Tupac Shakur
Tabitha Soren
Herbert Tarvin
Merlin Tuttle
Mara Wilson

1998

Bella Abzug
Kofi Annan
Neve Campbell
Sean Combs (Puff Daddy)
Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso)
Diana, Princess of Wales
Leonardo DiCaprio
Walter E. Diemer
Ruth Handler
Hanson
Livan Hernandez
Jewel
Jimmy Johnson
Tara Lipinski
Jody-Anne Maxwell
Dominique Moceanu
Alexandra Nechita
Brad Pitt
LeAnn Rimes
Emily Rosa
David Satcher
Betty Shabazz
Kordell Stewart
Shinichi Suzuki
Mother Teresa
Mike Vernon
Reggie White
Kate Winslet

1999

Ben Affleck
Jennifer Aniston
Maurice Ashley
Kobe Bryant
Bessie Delany
Sadie Delany
Sharon Draper
Sarah Michelle Gellar
John Glenn
Savion Glover
Jeff Gordon
David Hampton
Lauryn Hill
King Hussein
Lynn Johnston
Shari Lewis
Oseola McCarty
Mark McGwire
Slobodan Milosevic
Natalie Portman
J. K. Rowling
Frank Sinatra
Gene Siskel
Sammy Sosa
John Stanford
Natalia Toro
Shania Twain
Mitsuko Uchida
Jesse Ventura
Venus Williams

2000

Christina Aguilera
K.A. Applegate
Lance Armstrong
Backstreet Boys
Daisy Bates
Harry Blackmun
George W. Bush
Carson Daly
Ron Dayne
Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Doris Haddock (Granny D)
Jennifer Love Hewitt
Chamique Holdsclaw
Katie Holmes
Charlayne Hunter-Gault
Johanna Johnson
Craig Kielburger
John Lasseter
Peyton Manning
Ricky Martin
John McCain
Walter Payton
Freddie Prinze, Jr.
Viviana Risca
Briana Scurry
George Thampy
CeCe Winans

2001

Jessica Alba
Christiane Amanpour
Drew Barrymore
Jeff Bezos
Destiny's Child
Dale Earnhardt
Carly Fiorina
Aretha Franklin
Cathy Freeman
Tony Hawk
Faith Hill
Kim Dae-jung
Madeleine L'Engle
Mariangela Lisanti
Frankie Muniz
*N Sync
Ellen Ochoa
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